EVERY WEEK DEC. 13, 1924

Western Story Magazine

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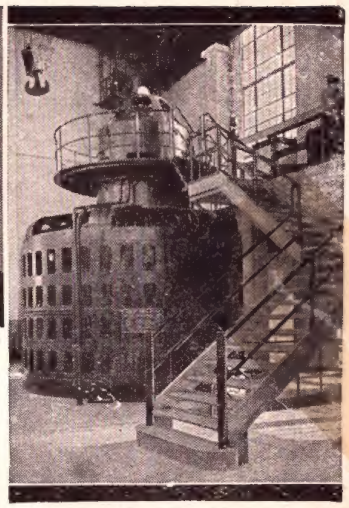

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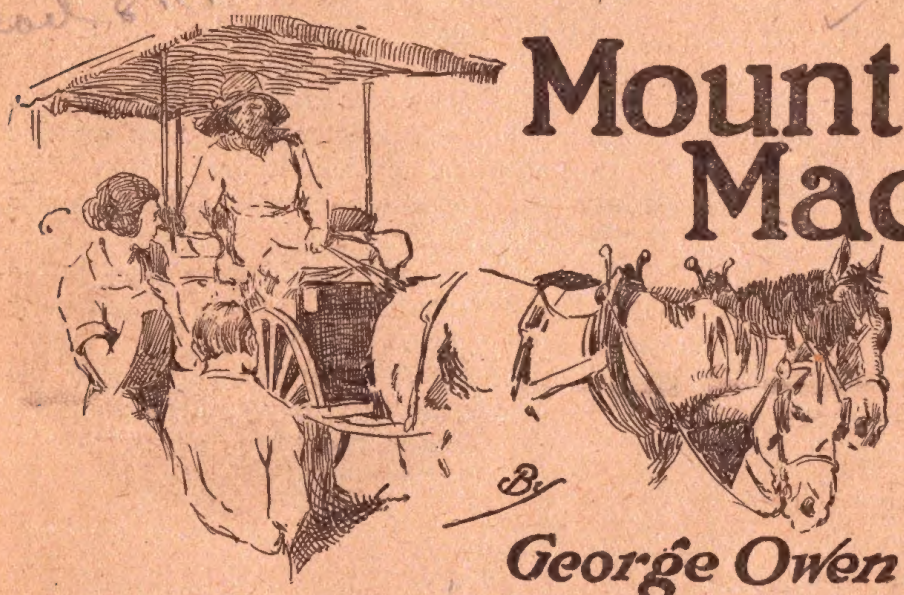


Mountain Made

By George Owen Baxter

Author of "Larramee's Ranch," etc.

CHAPTER I.

WINSOR'S ADOPTION.

NOTHING, of course, was at all too good for the wife of Hector Glanvil. He himself drove fifty miles across the mountains to get the best doctor on the range. This was young Mahan, who, coming freshly out of a medical school and a hospital, had made his fame by saving Ham Perkins' little boy from the deadly grip of diphtheria and curing the perennial rheumatism of Joe Chalmers. He became, in the course of a single fortnight, a byword and a prophet among a sparse but wide-spread population of cattlemen, lumberjacks, miners, hardy sons of toil, with fists as resistless as the heel of a high boot, with oaths more wonderful than those of a conjurer, but withal, possessing the power of faith. They believed in young Doctor Mahan. They even brought their favorite "cuttin" horses to him in scorn of the veterinaries, and he did his best.

He said to Hector Glanvil: "Man, man, how can I take a day off to drive up to your ranch, and then a day to take care of your wife, and then another day to come back—three days when I'm so crowded with work?"

Hector Glanvil laid a hand upon the shoulder of the young doctor. Hector himself was young, but he was a hero, and heroes seem to be of no particular age. When they are young, they seem old. When they are old, they seem young.

So it was with Hector. His presence was like that of a great rock face when the fierce brightness of morning is striking upon it; or like a shining silver spruce on the crest of a hill.

So this Hector Glanvil laid his hand upon the shoulder of the doctor and said: "You're tired; you're coming up with me to rest; you better go pack your bag."

The doctor looked up to the thick shoulders, and up to the noble throat, and up to the glorious face of Hector Glanvil. All the little needs and duties of his life fell away from his consciousness and left him free to serve this man. He felt that Hector Glanvil was a spring of youth in which he would bathe and be renewed in body and soul. So he packed his bag and tumbled into the buckboard.

They began to rush through the mountains as fast as high-blooded horseflesh could whip the buckboard along.

"I suppose it will be a boy?" said the doctor.

"It will be a boy," said Hector calmly, and thereby made it an inescapable fact.

"And the name?" said the doctor.

"The name is Winsor Terence Glanvil."

"A considerable name," said the doctor lightly.

Hector was never jovial. He said with perfect calm: "He will be a considerable man."

The doctor, after all, was only human. He would have given a great deal if it had been a girl, simply to disprove what Hector had prophesied; but fortune was against him. A boy baby was born the next day. He had hardly opened his eyes when he caught the finger of the nurse in one tiny fist and the finger of the doctor in the other.

"I suppose," said the doctor, "that he will be a ruler of women and of men."

"I suppose," said Hector, who had been watching everything, "that he will!"

"Why are you so thoughtful?" asked the doctor afterward. "There you have eight pounds of babyhood and as flawless a little body as I ever saw enter the world; he will grow into a glorious manhood!"

And he could not help looking up into the bright, calm face of Hector Glanvil.

"Mary's eyes are blue and her hair is gold," said Hector. "My eyes are blue also, and my hair is brown; but Winsor's eyes are brown and his hair is black."

The doctor would have been just a little embarrassed in the presence of any other man.

"Somewhere in the past," said the doctor, "your family or her family has had black hair and brown eyes."

"My great grandfather and her great great grandfather," said Hector instantly.

"You've studied the family trees, I see."

"Naturally. One would study the descent of a good horse, I suppose? And this is my son. What Mary and I give him is very little; but each of us has a past. This, however, is very odd."

"Why so?"

"I don't mean, you understand, that I think characters are transmitted through a lapse of half a century or more. But my great grandfather, Terence Glanvil, was a famous beau in his day; he was one of those men who make women smile and tremble by merely glancing at them. Mary's great great grandfather, Hugh Marston, who had brown eyes and black hair also, could do the same thing with men. He was a cruel devil.

He could pick up a man with a gesture, you might say, and crush the heart out of him. He shot straight by instinct, you might say, and his sword turned into a living thing in his hand."

After this, Hector Glanvil paused. He said a little later. "The important thing about both of them was that they *used* their power."

To this the doctor did not feel like replying. For even a great soul like Hector Glanvil does not care to be questioned about its inner suspicions. The next day two fresh horses whirled Doctor Mahan out of the mountains and back to his headquarters; he said good-by to Hector Glanvil as to a young god; but he was never to see that young god again. Poor Hector had barely reached his ranch to hear that a forest fire was heading his way. All his timber lands were imperiled. He went out and fought the flames for ten days with all his men and had almost won when a gale leaped out of the north and sent a smooth-sliding arm of the fire around Hector Glanvil and gathered him to the breast of the advancing flames.

There was nothing left for Mary Glanvil except the broad estates of her husband and the son he had left behind. But neither was enough. She waited on earth for two years until Winsor was a strong, hearty infant. Then she closed her eyes and died.

A cousin of Hector Glanvil, a young man called Philip, of the Glanvil name, came out of the East to manage the estate. He gambled away part of it in his first year. In his next two years he speculated to make up for the losses he had inflicted on the estate. In the fourth year of his management he fought desperately to avoid the inevitable. And at the end of his fifth year he turned to the last resort of a confused man. He shot himself through the head.

There was nothing left—absolutely nothing. Mary was the last of the Marstons. Philip was the last of the Glanvils. The joint heir of both those lines and all the long glories of their past histories, had not a penny to his name and not a relative to furnish him with means. He was mysteriously shuffled about and in the general direction of an orphan asylum. But children hate orphan asylums. They hate institutions of any kind—as though they understand that in such a place the delicate flower of childhood is cropped at once half opened and only the naked stem of existence remains.

Winsor Terence Glanvil was brought to the door of the asylum, so to speak, and then he disappeared. There was a feeble search for him by people who really did not care. Before they finished searching, Winsor was five hundred miles or more to the south. He had simply gone down to the railroad station and crawled onto the rods beneath a coach. He almost died of fatigue and exposure, but when he crawled out from his unpleasant place the next day, he was in a new and very different land.

There was a broad valley with mountains piled about it, blue and red and purple mountains carved out of uncarvable rock as hard as diamonds; and one solitary peak at the end of the valley living in a golden mist of sunshine. Below the mountains time had made a carefully leveled plain and sent a lazy brown river running through the midst. There was water enough to have turned all the valley into a lovely garden, but the men who lived there did not care for such arduous labors. Only random spots of greenery edged the river. Here —there—and again farther up the valley, there were three little towns with shining white walls and red roofs and clustering trees.

Winsor climbed back under the train. At noon he was in one of those towns. A brakeman fished him out and held him at arm's length, dangling.

"Where did *you* drop from?" he asked.

"I just happened along," said Winsor, and though he was more than half choked, he smiled at the strong man.

The brakeman beheld that smile and felt the iron in his heart melt away, and a spreading spot of warm compassion passed over his soul. He carried Winsor home to his wife.

His wife dropped the boy into a bathtub, tugged clean stockings over his legs, and combed his tangled hair. She put a white shirt on him and looked over her work. Straightway she ran out to her husband, gasping with astonishment.

"He looks like a young prince," she said. "He says his name is Winsor Terence Glanvil. That has a big sound to it."

"Sounds ain't dollars," said her spouse. "But we'll keep the poor kid till we find out where he belongs."

That afternoon, the brakeman's wife dressed up Winsor and tied a flowing bow tie under his chin and took him out on the street. She strolled with him where beauty would be admired—in the Mexican quarter—and when she brought him out his pockets were stuffed with candy and trinkets. For everywhere that he looked with those big eyes and that quiet little smile, fat señoras and slender young señoritas hurried out to see him and squat down before him and laugh and murmur with pleasure over him. Then she took him into the hilly section of the town where the big houses of the well-to-do stood. In ten minutes a carriage drew up to the sidewalk and a withered lady leaned out to say: "Is that your little boy?"

The little boy looked at the withered lady and wrinkled his nose in distaste. But he looked at the fine horses and the silver-mounted harness and the shining body of the carriage and changed his mind. He gave her his best smile and saw her flush and saw her eyes melt.

Afterward there was much talk which resolved itself into: "But what can you do for him, my dear woman?"

So Winsor Terence Glanvil was taken into the carriage and the brakeman's wife, dim of eye and faltering of step, went off down the street. Winsor was glad to see her go, for he was not too young to know that to be raised by her was to be raised to a life of toil; and he was not too young to know that he would never care to toil.

CHAPTER II.

A FORTUNE IN HIS POCKET.

THERE is no reason why Sabina Curtis should be given a place here, for the simple reason that in the mind of young Winsor Glanvil she occupied no place at all except that of a source of supplies. Her chief pleasure in life was to have this beautiful boy near her.

And the chief torment of Winsor Glanvil was to be near Sabina Curtis. But after one year of tutoring at home, her care for Winsor and his future made her send him away to a school in the East. After that, he had to see her only during the summer and at the Christmas vacation, and even these visits were not unbroken, for there were always plenty of invitations for Winsor. Not from the other boys at the school, however. He was never popular among them. He did not care for their sports and their games. He did not mingle with them except to covertly roll dice or play cards, for he had all the instinct of the born gambler.

But when mothers came to the school to see their boys, they never failed to notice Winsor Glanvil. His face attracted them; his name attracted them. They always insisted in meeting him; for he had an unobtrusive way of making himself noticed. And when he met them, his manner was so quiet, so easy, so gentle, so smooth, his attitude was so respectful, his big brown eyes so admiringly attentive, and his smile so

instant and so involuntary, as they thought, that they could not resist him.

"He's nothing but a sissy," their sons told them.

"There's something to that boy," they would answer. "He has a mind of his own. Besides, poor child, he has had misfortunes enough to break his spirit! No mother—no father—at his age!"

So Winsor was asked here and there in the summer and in the winter also. The only sports he learned were those in which a girl could accompany him. He paid not the slightest attention to football, baseball, the track, or crew, those four idols of the college boy's life and his four dreams of greatness. Nothing could have persuaded him to risk his head and his shins in a hockey game. Polo was a bore to Winsor, and boxing was simply brutal. But he learned to swim like a fish; he handled a tennis racket like a master; and he was acceptable in any golf foursome.

These were sociable sports in which the ladies could join. Perhaps the feminine heart was greatly impressed by spectacular deeds upon the gridiron and the track, but he did not care to impress them greatly in the beginning. Not at all! He wished merely to have an opportunity for a quiet little talk now and then—such as one may have between sets at tennis, or walking after a golf ball, or riding knee to knee through the park, or walking at the edge of the surf, or dancing over a polished floor. As for the rough sports—what are they worth?

Only once did he go in for brutal exertions. In the summer before his last year at the school he met a pretty little blond girl whose brother was captain of the next year's football team. She was full of fire and of scorn. And she told Winsor Glanvil with the brutal frankness of youth that she would never care a whit for any boy who did not have the courage to risk his neck at football.

She was just pretty enough and rich enough to make Winsor take her a little seriously. He spent his spare moments that summer learning how to kick and handle a football. And in the fall he startled the school by coming out for the squad.

It was impossible to keep him out of the backfield. He was so green that he hardly knew in what direction to run, but when he started correctly, it was like trying to catch an eel. He was sixteen, then, and stood his full height, which was five feet and ten inches. And he weighed a hundred and fifty pounds, which was within ten of his ultimate size. He looked too delicate, too slender, too girlishly smooth for rough work, but he had that surprising, inexpressible strength of a light thing put strongly together. He could twist through a mass of fighting linesmen as though his body were covered with grease. He could clip off tackle so fast that the tacklers saw only a blur of speed. And when he started around end, the entire opposition grew cold with dread. Besides, because he hated to be hurt, he learned how to avoid a tackler in the open field, and to see him sift through a whole team of eager enemies was enough to thrill the heart of the most expert college coach. And college coaches watched him work and their hearts ached to have him. But when the big game of the school season was over, he sat one evening in a corner with the pretty blonde. After all, he decided, he had made a ridiculous effort for the sake of one with a nose so short as hers. As for her rich father, she had too many brothers to divide the spoils.

So he said: "Football is a stupid game; I shall never play it again."

"Oh, Winsor," she cried, "but it will make you a *great* man in college."

"I'd rather be comfortable than great," said Winsor. "Good-by!"

He lived up to his word. No persuasion could make him try for the college

team; for four years he played through his courses, dabbled at the social sports; and just after he had received his diploma, he got word from Sabina Curtis that she was very sick. He took the first train West, filled with immense hopes. Not that the money of Sabina was enough to give him all that he wanted! But it was enough to enable him to move where great fortunes grow on every tree! So he sat by her deathbed and heard her say that her fortune had been turned into an annuity and that he would not have a penny after her death except her big house and the movables which were in it. He looked coldly down upon her.

"I wish you had warned me a year ago," said he. "I could have become engaged to the Warner girl last fall, you know!"

"Winsor, Winsor!" murmured the sick woman, straining her dull eyes toward him. "Do you care for nothing in the world except money?"

"Money is nothing to me," he told her. "But comfort is. I'm not equipped to make a living, you know. You never insisted on that, Aunt Sabina."

She sighed, and a cloud formed on her brow.

"Winsor, do you really care nothing about me and the deep, deep love I have felt for you, dear?" she asked him in an agitated voice.

"Of course I do—tremendously!" said Winsor.

He spoke so coldly that it went through and through her heart. And she looked up to him, startled into clear-seeing, for a moment. But when her glance met those big, gentle brown eyes, fixed upon her with what seemed a melting tenderness, all her suspicions vanished.

"Ah, Winsor," she said to him, "I have loved you as a mother loves her son."

He leaned above her, wondering if her will was really made out already.

"You have been more than a mother," said he.

"Do you speak from your heart?" said the poor woman, yearning up to him, and raising her weak hands toward his face.

She was an ugly picture, and Winsor Glanvil hated ugliness in any form. He could not help turning from all that was repulsive to the eye. Now he steeled himself. He called up into his voice a little tremulous fiber of sound which, he had discovered, is peculiarly effective with every woman, old or young.

"Dear Aunt Sabina," he said. "I cannot talk—I am too sad——"

He was able to leave a little after that, and a few minutes later she died. Within the hour he had learned the price which he could get for the house and the land and all that was within the old mansion. Fifty thousand dollars.

"But you ought not to sell," said the lawyer when approached later. "Consider those books in the library. To duplicate them would cost you fifty thousand dollars alone—I mean their bindings done afresh without any of the charm and the allusions which these old books have."

"I am a Glanvil, not a Curtis," said Winsor. "I desire to sell everything at once, and I hope that you will arrange for it."

The lawyer swallowed certain hot words which had formed in the deep of his throat and went away to do as he was ordered. Yet he could not refrain from a touch of irony when he handed Winsor Glanvil a check for forty-eight thousand and five hundred dollars a few days later.

"You have done amazingly well with yourself, Glanvil," he said. "Fourteen years ago you were without a penny in the world. Here, at the age of twenty-one, you have equipped yourself with a fine education, fifty thousand dollars in cash, and no regrets, I presume?"

Glanvil knew perfectly well what the other was driving at, but he merely lighted a cigarette and mocked the lawyer with a smile through the mist of blue-brown smoke.

"I am only an amateur so far," said he with equal irony to the man of the law. "I hope to do better later on."

"Ah, well," said the lawyer. "I rather doubt that. I think you were born with the professional touch, young man!

"But," he added when he reached the door, "I suppose that you have plans for increasing the fifty thousand greatly before long?"

The one thing which Glanvil had always lacked to make him a successful gambler, he felt, was a large bank roll. Now he nodded with the utmost complacency. "Of course," said he.

The lawyer broke into loud and very rude laughter and left the house; Glanvil walked out after him. He had a fortune in his pocket, a laugh on his lips, and not a single regret, as the lawyer had suggested, in his heart. For the past never bothered Glanvil. Nothing but the future lay before him.

CHAPTER III.

SANTELLE PRESENTS A PLAN.

NOW four swift years passed over the head of Winsor Terence Glanvil. It is, as a rule, a sign of peace when the annals of a country are a blank, but these were not blank years with young Glanvil. But since the events wrote not a line into his face, it is permissible to omit the record of what actually happened.

We leap across the four years which had carried Mr. Glanvill around the globe but brought him back, after so much wandering, to his native West. To follow his trail we leave the railroad and advance to a little town in the mountains from which rough roads lead here and there to mines near the timber line. We come to a little unpainted shack of two stories, dignified with the name of "hotel," and in the hotel we go to the best front room. There sits Winsor Glanvil. He has before him the mirror—not of the room, but from his own leather toilet case—he has a lighted lamp upon either side of him—and he is busy manicuring his nails with the care of a precisian, with the speed of an artist. What has become of the varied interests of Winsor Glanvil? Where is the tidy fortune with which he started out upon his wanderings in search of an easy life? There is nothing left—nothing except the toilet case and the big, roomy suit case which could contain a whole trunkful of odds and ends. That is all that he has accumulated—physically! In the brain there are gathered all manner of talents which do not show outwardly, for in his face we look in vain for a single trace of the passing of time. There is not a line about his mouth not near the corner of his eyes; there is not a shadow; there is not the slightest crease between his eyes. His face is as untouched as that of an infant.

Such was the Winsor Terence Glanvil who rose in answer to a knock at his door. He opened to a dark-faced man well advanced in middle age, dapper and trim as a youth.

"It is true!" cried he. "It is true, after all! It is the immortal Monsieur Glanvil himself!"

"You are Paul Santelle," said Glanvil, and drew him through the door. He went on, without emotion: "Why are you here?"

"You are not overfilled with friendliness, my dear Glanvil. Your eye does not light when you see me. You do not wring my hand."

He did not say this with the slightest sharpness of irony, but smiling in perfect good nature.

"As you know," said Glanvil, "I detest action and love repose. Besides, I

am really curious as to what can have brought you here."

"Can you imagine nothing?"

"One can imagine a thousand things on the smallest grounds. But as I said before, I hate effort. Please do not force me to imagine, to deduce, to analyze like Poe's detective. What is that?"

A thunder of hoofbeats, a rush of shouting voices—then came the sound of doors slamming; a deep, throbbing tumult through the street.

"Go to the window and look at the picture if you wish," said Glanvil. "I prefer to sit still. I suppose there's another gold strike. In the meantime, you cannot doubt my hospitality. I offer you my best chair."

Santelle nodded at the window. "They are going mad, as usual," he announced. "This must be something real. In a day or two I suppose we'll have a few more of these incipient millionaires in town! I hope so!"

"You are doing business here, then?" asked Glanvil.

"Yes."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"Tush, man. I would not cramp you for room. There is enough food here to supply a dozen even of such hawks as you and I! The field is so open that when I first came it was possible to work bad dice on them. They didn't want to win, I swear. They wanted the thrill of losing their money as fast as they could, and that was all!" He laughed softly, contentedly. "I have been here seven days; I have made a shade over seven thousand, working only an hour or two a day."

Glanvil was not impressed. "That," said he, "is wages. When are you to make your profit?"

Santelle stared at him, but then nodded in good-natured agreement. "You, of course, are the plunger, the star taker," said he. "Remember that I have seen you at Nice and in Buenos Ayres. In fact, you have always been so successful that I wonder why the devil it is that you have to keep at the work?"

Glanvil regarded him with a perfect equanimity. He said, with the calm of one who reserves lies for important occasions and believes in the truth for nearly all the affairs of everyday life: "My total possessions are in this room. I have fifteen hundred in cash. The rest you can see."

Santelle shook his head. "I understand," said he. "You have invested in some Mexican revolution? Is it that?"

"It is not that!"

"What, then? Man, man, I have seen you take in so many thousands in a single night——"

"Why should I lie to you?" murmured Glanvil. "As a matter of fact, my dear friend, there is only the one answer. I occasionally meet with a gambler cleverer than I am. His tricks are better; he cheats with more skill. And there goes my money. You understand? But of course you do."

"It amazes me!" declared Santelle with warmth. "I swear to you, Glanvil, I believed there were not three men in the world capable of——"

"Nonsense," answered Winsor Glanvil. "You are flattering me now."

"But even discounting the cards," said Santelle. "Ten thousand pardons if I am too curious!"

"Not at all," answered Glanvil. "I am fond of talking; particularly about myself. And at this very moment I am in the humor for chatting. Say what you please and dip the bucket until I feel like cutting the rope."

"Very well, Glanvil. Suppose that you left the cards to one side, and abandoned all gambling whatsoever, still you have remaining 'that one talent which is death to hide.' I really cannot comprehend why you have not connected yourself with some great fortune."

Over this, Glanvil paused for a mo-

ment. "We seem to be more intimate than I thought," said he.

"I was in Venice when you and Costello——"

Glanvil raised his hand. "That is quite enough," said he.

"You admit that I have reason to be astonished. The lovely countess, every one said, was only too eager to give away her fortune and herself to Mr. Glanvil."

"There is one hideous drawback which handicaps me hopelessly, as it seems, as a fortune hunter."

"What is that?"

"I am infernally particular as to the lady who is to share the name of Glanvil."

It might have been considered an atrocious stroke of egotism except for the smile of the speaker.

"It is an old name, I have heard," said Santelle with much interest.

"Immensely old. It goes back past the Conquest a dizzy distance. I am foolish about it."

"But the family of the countess——"

'Was old also. But she had a voice like a chorus girl's. I endured it for a week. That was enough. And that, Santelle, is the secret of my failures."

"One can be too critical, of course. But a million or so, one might think, would sweeten a very sour cup."

"I have tried to close my eyes and my ears a dozen times. I never quite succeed."

"Surely," said Santelle, "there are a few charming girls——"

"With great fortunes? Of course. But I have a past. Now and then a wave of it overtakes me and forces me to move on. However, I am still able to amuse myself. Now, my dear Santelle, what is all this about?"

"It is about a nonpareil."

"You have a system for the wheel," suggested the fortune hunter, yawning.

"I have not. It is a lady, my friend."

"With money, of course."

"With uncounted millions."

"I suppose so."

"This is an indubitable fact."

"The whole world knows about her, then."

"Therein lies the charm. She is unknown except to a very few."

"But how large is the fortune, really?"

"At least eight millions—perhaps fifteen."

"This sounds like a great affair, Santelle. However, she is being courted already——"

"Of course. Wherever there is honey the bees will find it out. But they have only begun to come. They find everything so simple, however, that they are filled with doubts."

"Tell me, Santelle, what do you hope out of this?"

"One third, my dear Glanvil."

"You are modest."

"I tell you, I am leading you to a gold mine."

"Which is already staked out and claimed by others!"

"Not at all. They cannot disturb her. She is a romantic little soul; and not one of them can stir her. But when she meets Glanvil and his old-world manner, when she encounters those brown eyes and that famous smile——"

"Don't talk like an ass."

"However, I tell you that you have only to appear in order to conquer. This girl knows nothing."

"Tell me the secret."

"Easily. Her father was a prospector for the bigger part of his life. His wife died young. That left Louise to play the housekeeper and take care of old Joseph Carney when he returned from his trips. He brought very little cash back with him. Sometimes she was pretty close to starvation. But she was so used to it that she didn't complain. She had books. She was a great deal alone. For a companion she finally found a blind girl, a queer thing named

Kate Preston. And Kate has been the only friend of Louise Carney for several years.

"Old Joe Carney struck gold, at last. But he didn't splurge. He rebuilt the old cabin and gave Louise a cook and a maid. That was to begin with; and he didn't go much past it. He tore gold out of the ground as fast as his men could blast the rock away. He dumped that money into lumber lands. He built twenty miles of railroad into his lumber lands. For six years he lived in a hurricane of falling money. Then he died. Louise is twenty-one. She lives still in the cabin on the side of the mountain.. Her lawyer writes to her from Denver and gives her statements, mentions large sums—she doesn't know what he's talking about, and I don't think that she cares. She has her house, her cook, her maid, and her garden. She has a horse to ride on and a dog to go alongside her. That's life enough for her.

"In a single word, she dreams, my dear Glanvil. And she is waiting for a man to come to her out of a dream and show her what can be done with life in the way of making it beautiful. There have been a few clumsy fellows to bother her. But they are nothing. It is you, Glanvil, who must descend like a god in a cloud of fire."

"That," said Glanvil, "is enough. Tell me only one thing. Is she at least ordinarily good looking?"

"Glanvil, she is an exquisite beauty, made of gold and rose and blue and ivory. Do you understand?"

"I understand. A pretty face, and big feet. A charming smile and calloused hands?"

Santelle waved both hands in a gesture filled with emotion.

"When you see her, you will be ravished, believe me. I tell you, she is as harmonious as music."

"This begins to appear more and more promising."

"There is only the single drawback."

"What is that?"

"The blind girl."

"You are jesting."

"You will understand when you meet the household. That is the danger point. If you can defend yourself from her wit, you are safe. The blind girl is the outward fortification. Beautiful Louise is the defenseless city itself!"

CHAPTER IV.

BEAUTIFUL LOUISE.

WHEN Glanvil first saw her, she was in the garden, that bright little patch of color which rested on the shoulder of the mountain and seemed about to slide off into the awful ravine beneath. She was training some sort of limber-armed flowering vines over an arched trellis work, weaving the vines in and out among the slats and tying them with short bits of twine.

He called to her: "Is Mr. Carney at home?"

At this, she raised her head. It was brown hair, and yet there was enough light struck through it by the sun to justify what Santelle had said about gold; certainly, however, he was wrong about the rose. It was a pale, calm face, and even while she turned toward him, her eyes were lowered toward the ground.

"Mr. Carney is not here," she said.

He liked her voice. He liked it very much. But it destroyed, instantly, the impression of childish impotence and innocence which Santelle had given him concerning the heiress, for there was as much self-control, as much easy surety, as there could have been in the voice of a man.

"I understood that this was Mr. Carney's house."

"Mr. Carney is dead, sir."

She began to work while she faced him, work without giving an apparent glance to the employment of her hands. How swiftly they drew the fragile

branches through the trellis, and yet with how delicate a tenderness, also!

"I am sorry to hear of that, but perhaps it is better for me. I have admired the situation of this house so much, that I should like to buy it and all the ground around it, if possible. Do you think that it could be arranged?"

"I hardly know," said she. "Almost anything is possible, I suppose. But if you care for the place, come into the garden, please. Every one says that the view is much finer from this point."

He dismounted and tethered his horse at the hitching rack. The ghost of Santelle seemed to be moving behind him in his shadow, laughing, and clapping him on the back with a viewless hand. He himself had to bite his lip to keep from smiling, it was all so very easy!

So he crossed the garden and stood beside her. She was not such a heart stopper as Santelle had led him to expect. She was as pale as marble, not a sickly color, however, but a translucent pallor. When she looked down, the deep fringe of lashes seemed to lay a shadow beneath her eyes. When she looked up the eyes themselves were a sort of dull black unlike any eyes in all the world, so far as he had seen.

"Here," she said as he came beside her, "you can see a great deal of the valley itself. One can feel the wind from the mountains cutting straight across. And no matter how hard the wind blows, one can hear the river."

There was a dizzy fall of the eye, in fact, to the white waters of the river. Now the morning mist lay thick between and tinted the river with pale blue. And the dark forests hung like irregular rolling clouds of smoke along the steep sides of the mountain. A bridge, small as a child's toy, at that distance, crossed the water just before it spread across the valley in a lake. The beauties of nature meant very little to Glanvil. But now he was stirred.

"It is more than I expected—a great deal more," he said truthfully. "May I give you my name? I am Winsor Glanvil. You are Miss Carney, I presume?"

"I am Katherine Preston," she said.

He set his teeth hard. Of course he had been the most consummate fool not to have guessed before that this was the blind girl. And yet that adroit work with her hands, the surety with which she looked straight into his face as he talked, were enough to have deceived him even if he had guessed beforehand.

"Do you know if Miss Carney would sell?"

"I don't know. I hardly think so. But one never can tell. Miss Carney may move before the winter comes."

"That is a strange thing," said Glanvil, "that a person could wish to leave such a place."

"Are you not very young, Mr. Glanvil, to wish to live in such a quiet spot among the mountains?"

And she fixed those dark eyes upon him with so much thoughtfulness in her expression that he had the uncanny feeling that she *must* be reading his face. He found himself forming a smile with as much care as though she could see it.

"I suppose I am," he said, and he watched the incredible delicacy with which she passed a limber branch of the vine through her fingers, touched all of the hundred papery blossoms along its length, but not disturbing a single petal! "I suppose I am, but I want to feel what it means to be snowed in for a whole winter."

"Miss Carney is coming," said the blind girl.

"How can you tell?"

"By the step of her horse."

"Is it different from other horses?"

"One can tell, somehow. But my ears have to be eyes, also, you know."

"Do they help you to read faces?"

"Not faces—no! But I think they help me to find what is in the hearts of people, you see."

He found that he had grown actually restless and ill at ease in front of this girl, as though that eye of her mind, fixed so mysteriously upon him, saw nothing of his physical being but looked clearly into the wickedness of his soul.

"At least," said she, "Miss Carney will be interested in your wish for a—winter home!"

He looked intently at her to see if she were smiling, but her face was as grave as her great dark eyes, and these were so filled with light and with meaning that it seemed to him, for the hundredth time, that this pretended blindness was nothing but a sham.

A moment later, Louise Carney was with them. She was what Santelle had described, hardly larger than a child, and full of a child's happy carelessness, a flowerlike indolence. Kate Preston introduced them. As for the work of the excellent Glanvil, he saw that it was finished almost before it was begun, for the rich man's daughter watched him with a child's openness, a child's utter fascination. She did not have sufficient art to look down to the ground, but let him see clearly in her eyes all that passed in her mind; as a little girl stares at the image of the perfect prince that rises before her from the page of the story book.

Indeed, the work was ended before it had well begun. Another touch was all he needed to make her his. Glanvil smothered a yawn at the very thought, for, through long hours of weariness, how dearly he would have to pay for the fortune he took. However, it is impossible to get something for nothing.

"Mr. Glanvil wants to spend a winter snowed in, and he would like to buy your house, Louise," said Kate Preston.

"Oh," said she. "It was my father's house, Mr. Glanvil."

"You would not sell it, then?"

"When he has left me so much money—how could I? It would be a shameful thing!"

"I am a thousand times sorry," said Glanvil. "I merely saw the house and thought I might get it."

She nodded, watching him in that same eager, incredulous fashion, as though every feature of his face were a miracle.

"Good-by," said Glanvil.

"Wait!" called the girl. He could see her full of fear at the thought of losing him.

"The very best view is from the second story—isn't it, Kate?"

"I don't think so," said Kate, still with those grave, overwise eyes fixed upon the new man.

"I'd be very happy to see it," said Glanvil.

They went into the house together; then he dropped back to the side of Kate Preston, who had followed.

"May I help you?" he asked her.

She looked up to him with the faintest of smiles upon her lips.

"I don't know," she murmured. "Perhaps you had better stay with me for a little while."

What had she been able to discover—what had she been able to guess? That faint, sad smile filled him with apprehension. For, though she could have seen nothing, perhaps that ear which knew the tread of a horse and heard the voice of the river in spite of the wind, had been able to read the tone of his voice and the tone of the voice of Louise.

He was so filled with that idea that he was gloomily silent as he joined Louise on the floor above. He saw that she was troubled by that silence of his; with only half of his mind he followed the chatter of her talk. He heard her, but from the corner of his eye he was watching Kate. The blind girl had gone to the window on the farther side of the room, and there she stood with her head raised and such a light in her eyes as though, in very fact, she saw the mountains before her.

He remembered the warning of Santelle, but now it had a doubly trenchant point. He had never seen another woman like her, nor another man. And he knew, above all, that nothing in his soul of souls was escaping her!

"Does she see nothing?" he could not help whispering to the girl.

She shook her head. "Kate was born blind," she declared. "Why do you ask?"

"Because she seems to be looking."

"I know what you mean. Nothing bothers me so much as that. To have her reading my mind."

A chill ran over the body of the fortune hunter. "Does she do that?" he asked.

"Oh, of course. Every one knows that she can."

It was not true. Of course it could not be true. And yet a perspiration broke out on him.

What was Louise saying about the valley?

"The best time to see it is the break of day; but next to that in the late afternoon—you must come to have tea with us. Then you can see it with the mist gone and the shadows—you really must come!"

"I shall be very happy to."

"This afternoon, if you wish!"

She waited with her lips parted, her eyes wide, like a child begging for a favor. Glanvil bit his lip.

"Of course," said he. "That would be perfect."

And he heard Kate Preston, at her window, sigh, and turn away with all the light gone from her face.

CHAPTER V.

WINSOR SIGNS.

WHEN he got back to town, Santelle was already waiting at his room in the hotel, busily writing at a table.

He called over his shoulder: "Well, Glanvil, you found her?"

"Yes."

"It was easier than you dreamed, eh?"

"What makes you think that?"

"I heard you whistling down the street."

"It's a pleasant day, Santelle."

"Nonsense! Weather never made that difference to you!" He added, as he finished his writing: "I hope you're a grateful fellow, Glanvil."

"I haven't the slightest idea how things could turn out," lied Glanvil.

"Well, in case they *do* turn out well, I have a little paper here for you."

He passed it to Glanvil, who read:

I, Winsor Terence Glanvil, agree that in case of a marriage between me and Louise Carney, one third of all the money and the value of property which I receive through that marriage shall be paid over to Paul Santelle. (Signed.)

Glanvil laughed lightly and tossed the paper back. "I am not an absolute ass, my friend," said he.

"This was all agreed," Santelle reminded him. "This was all planned before I took you here to the gold mine."

"By way of conversation," said Glanvil, "one is apt to say all manner of foolish things! But as for a legal contract—why, Santelle, I am apt to have the entire estate, one of these days, and if I get nine millions you expect to have three of them? That obviously is absurd!"

"Not for my work."

"You have been a mere sign post on the road to a fortune.

"I came to you in the nick of time. I tell you, this girl would have been married within a month. She's ready to be plucked. There are twenty youngsters who are as keen as fire after her. If it had not been for the sign post, Glanvil, you would have found the claim already preëmpted."

"Trust to my generosity," said Glanvil. "But as for the signing of documents—on my honor, I detest such a thought!"

Santelle showed no passion. He kept the paper in his hand, smoothing the wrinkles from it with the most scrupulous care.

"I am to be defrauded," he said carelessly. "I am to be left on the rail with nothing. Is that the plan?"

"Not at all. You know that I am generous, Santelle."

"I hear you announce that fact at present. I have never heard of it before. You are acting a very foolish part, Glanvil."

"Am I? What is your power, Santelle?"

"A great one. I simply let something concerning the past of this Winsor Glanvil escape from me——"

Glanvil shook his head. "I have no fear of that. The more salt you sprinkle on the fire the brighter the flames will burn. Opposition is the food of love, my dear fellow."

"It isn't the girl," said Santelle. "No, no! I would never dream of going to a girl to damn her lover. That is the best way to make her marry him at once. The nearest I ever came to marrying a fortune myself was by hiring some rascals to go around to her and tell her the truth about myself. That truth was really so black that she would not believe it. She would have married me instantly if the parents had not had wind of what was about to happen. They were off in an instant; they packed up their baggage and packed up the girl as well. In a single day they were started across the ocean. I lost at least four millions."

"Of dollars?"

"Of francs—which is fortune enough. I am of moderate tastes. I am not like you, Glanvil."

"But this news you could spread about concerning me—where would you go with it?"

Santelle took him to the window. "He was there a moment ago on the porch of the general merchandise store. Yes, there he is now. Not the old chap and not the boy. The big man with the hat pushed onto the back of his head."

Glanvil looked down on a Hercules; a man with the bulk of an ox and the fine finish of a greyhound; he looked big enough to lift a horse and fleet enough to outrun a dog.

"Who is that?" he asked.

"That is Jack Rutledge. Look him over with care, Glanvil. Two years ago a grizzly hugged him; and he killed the grizzly. Some men say he did it with his bare hands, and they are almost believed. That is the confidence that people in these mountains have in Jack Rutledge. Of course he had a knife. But a man who can kill a grizzly with a little hunting knife—do you know much about the big bears, Glanvil?"

"Not a thing in the world."

"I have seen a grizzly knock a three-hundred-pound black bear twenty feet, head over heels, and landed him against a tree so hard that it knocked the wind out of the black chap. Well, this is only by the way to make you appreciate what Rutledge did. Look at him again."

And Winsor Glanvil, looking again, saw the story of the bear fight at once made a possibility. The long, strong jaw of Jack Rutledge and the sharp, restless eyes placed under the shadow of a sternly arched nose were the type of the hero, the superman. Not a calm and glorious hero, such as he had seen in the family pictures of his father, Hector Glanvil; but a savage, relentless, battle-loving fellow with the ferocity of a leopard and the crushing power of a lion. Such was the appearance of Jack Rutledge.

"But what has he to do with this affair?" asked Glanvil.

"One or two things that will interest you. In the first place he is a lover of Louise Carney."

"In that capacity I don't fear him a whit. That scalped, ugly mountain,

yonder, would have as good a chance of winning her."

"Perhaps. But there's another thing. He's the leader of the men in this part of the range. He's a sort of demigod here."

"And the bearing of that is——"

"Give me time, my friend. I wish to show you just how important Jack Rutledge is to you—and to me—at this stage of our little game. Jack Rutledge, you might say, is the god of justice in these mountains. He's an exceptional fellow!"

"At least forty pounds above the average," said Glanvil, sneering.

"You have to hear me out. He's a college man, this Rutledge. But when he got through with college, he decided that he cared more for these mountains than he did for the law. He gave up his career—and a devilishly promising one it was—and came to these mountains to live. Here he has settled down. He has a little ranch tucked away in a hollow—a few hundred acres of grazing land and a quarter section of farm. He makes a living off of that land—no more than a living, however. So you see it isn't with money that he buys his power."

Winsor Glanvil yawned and slipped lower in his chair into a comfortable position.

"It will be over soon," said Santelle, his sharp eyes glittering at Glanvil with a suppressed anger. "I want to show you what strength this fellow Rutledge has. Two years ago, two of the oldest politicians in the county ran for sheriff. Rutledge didn't approve of either of them. They were both hand in glove with the crooks. They caught the little fellows and let the big fellows go free. Yellow curs, you see, but they were well known and well liked. However, Rutledge stepped in and put his foot down. He selected a young chap who was known simply as an ignorant hunter. He made that fellow run for sheriff and elected him by the sheer weight of his personal influence. I tell you that to show you his strength in the land!"

"And what sort of a sheriff did the hunter make?"

"A hawk, a regular hunting hawk, Glanvil. He's run crime into the ground. He's caught the rustlers in traps; he's trailed down the long riders; and he's made this county a big black spot on the map of every crook in the country—because Rutlege knows a man when he sees one. In fact, he can do what he pleases here, and no one asks a question. If they want to raise the salary of the school teacher, they go to Rutledge and ask him what he thinks about it.

"I heard an odd story a little while ago. The blacksmith had trouble with his wife, chiefly because the blacksmith was too fond of moonshine. Finally the wife left and went to Denver to live with her sister's family. The blacksmith pretended that he didn't give a darn, you understand—until Rutledge heard about it and went to him. Nobody knows exactly what Rutledge said. But, the next day, the blacksmith started for Denver, and he came home with his wife. Rutledge had given him the price of three tickets and a new suit of clothes. They're the happiest couple in the town, now, people tell me. All because of Rutledge! You see what the fellow can do? He can reach the highest and the lowest in the country.

"The rich man, Will Clawson, was about to foreclose on the poorest devil of a rancher in the whole county—named Joe Carpaccio. Rutledge went up country and asked Clawson to hold off. Clawson told him to go to the devil. So Rutledge went away and came back with twenty men behind him. That made Clawson change his mind. He gave Carpaccio time to pay interest and principal. Rutledge and the rest helped poor Joe out of the hole. Now Carpaccio is a prosperous man, com-

paratively. And even Clawson is glad that he didn't foreclose."

"It looks to me that your friend Rutledge has his hand in every one's business!"

"Not *my* friend," said Santelle, with a grimace. "Because his eye is a bit too sharp for me, Glanvil. He looks through me and sees that I'm a crook, just as he would look through you and see that *you're* a crook!"

Glanvil sat up, abruptly. "Do you class me with yourself?" he asked, sneering.

"Lower," said Santelle, with the slowness of cold conviction. "Much lower! I've come out of the gutter and risen to be a—gentleman crook. You are the son of Hector Glanvil, and here you sit planning dirty work with me!"

Glanvil smiled and sank back in the chair again, watching the other from beneath his lowered, long lashes.

"Very well," he said, with a brutal terseness, though his voice was as soft as ever. "We'll let that go and get down to the point of this business. You want a third of the profits from this marriage. I say that a flat cash reward is enough."

"How much cash, my friend?"

"Say—five thousand?"

Santelle laughed without mirth.

"Or ten thousand at the most."

"It won't do, Glanvil."

"Then you get nothing! And now, what's the gun you can put to my head?"

"The gun is Rutledge. I go to him after the engagement is announced and tell him what I know about you."

"Suppose, my friend, that I slip away with the girl and marry her before you have time to turn around?"

"That would be extremely rash. In that case, I give you my word that Rutledge would think nothing of following you and shooting you like a dog!"

"He would never take the chance," said Glanvil, growing a little pale.

"Glanvil, have I been talking in vain?"

Glanvil rose from his chair and went again to the window, and so he looked carefully down on the lounging form of big Jack Rutledge.

"Now that I have a chance to think everything over," he said at last, turning around on Santelle again, "I suppose that your services in the matter are really worth about a third of the profits."

"Ah," purred Santelle. "I knew that you would be reasonable in the end." He held forward the paper. "This is ready to be signed," said he.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND.

GLANVIL had no intention of hurrying affairs. But it was impossible to go slowly. If he made a motion, Louise Carney made a whole step. She had a habit of fixing her eyes upon his face as though she were reading a book, and every change in his expression was more than words to her. By the third day he knew that he had only to speak in order to have her accept him as her fiancé. But he put that moment off because of a belated sense of the appropriate. For now and then it came over him that though her years were the years of a woman, her mind was the mind of a child, a child delightfully done in gold and blue, in rose and ivory.

They had tea together on that first day. On the second, they rode far away through the hills and along the side of Croton Mountain. On the third day there was a walk. On the fourth day they were engaged for a picnic in the woods, and he purposely remained away and sent up a message that unexpected business detained him. But, on the fifth day, he was with her again.

And big Jack Rutledge was leaving as he arrived. Louise introduced them. She laid one hand on the arm of Jack Rutledge and smiled up into his face—

that arm like the trunk of a tree, that stern face, strong and immobile as the statue of an Egyptian king.

"This is my dearest and my oldest friend—this is Jack Rutledge," she said. "When we had hard days—that seems so long ago—we could never have gotten on if it hadn't been for Jack!"

Glanvil resented that remark; for he already had a possessive sense about her. When she was his wife, however, he would very soon teach her certain differences to be observed in speech and in manners. Certainly she would never be allowed to express any sense of obligation to a rough, common fellow like this. Certainly she would never be allowed to refer to the days of her poverty.

This he registered quietly in his mind while he shook hands with Rutledge and felt fingers as hard as oak close over his own soft palm. And, moreover, the eyes of Rutledge, rather small and very bright, like the eyes of a great bird of prey stared through him. He remembered what Santelle had said, that this man would see straight into the truth of such rascals as the pair of them! And, for the moment, he almost believed Santelle.

It frightened him.

"Dear Jack—poor old Jack!" said the girl as she led him into the garden.

He did not have to ask her why she was pitying the big man. It was simply because "poor Jack" had again proposed on this unlucky day and had been refused. He determined on the spot that he would risk no more delay. As long as those keen, determined eyes were apt to probe into his past, it was better to have the business over and done with at once. He decided that on this day he would ask Louise to marry him.

And what place would be better chosen for that ceremony than the garden? It was a delightful day, the air new-washed by a rain, cool, fresh, and the sky the pure and transparent blue which lives only in the heavens above mountaintops. There was only a single blur—a mass of wind-driven cloud flying from the top of Mount Croton like a tremendous battle flag.

Kate Preston stood up as they came near. She gathered up some flowers which lay beside her and turned away toward the house.

"Do you have to go in, Kate?" asked Louise Carney in half hearted protest.

"I have to go in," said the blind girl. "Good afternoon, Mr. Glanvil."

"How could you possibly tell that it was I?" he broke out, amazed for the tenth time by her prescience.

"By your step," said she. "And by the voice of Louise."

And she went off down the garden path as freely and surely as though her dark eyes were wells of the truest sight. Only at the garden steps she made a little pause, and went slowly up them, like an old woman feeling for the stairs. They watched her pass into the house and out of sight.

"Oh," said Louise, "when I think how wonderfully beautiful she would be if she had a meaning in her eyes—dear Kate!"

Glanvil frowned. He had never connected the blind girl with any thought of beauty. But, after all, she *was* beautiful, except that she was a little too pale.

"She doesn't like me, I'm afraid," he said, speaking aloud his ever-present thought.

By the guilty little start of Louise he knew that his guess had been close enough to the truth.

"Of course she does," said the girl. "Why shouldn't she?"

"I don't know," said Glanvil, honestly enough. "I really don't know. But from the first day, she didn't like me."

"You must be wrong!"

He turned and faced her squarely. "Am I really wrong?" he asked.

At this, she flushed. "You see," she

said gently, "Kate is full of intuitions. And she lacks one sense which the rest of us have. So that if she is a little strange in her judgments now and then, we have to be gentle with her, don't we?"

"By all means," answered Glanvil.

He would provide for the blind girl, he decided, after the marriage. But Louise should never see her again. It was too dangerous—much too dangerous. He feared Jack Rutledge because of the keenness in his sharp eyes; he feared the blind girl because of some mysterious power which he could not comprehend. She had shrunk from him, spiritually, on the very first day of their meeting.

He said aloud: "What can have prejudiced her against me?"

"Almost nothing, at first. And then, just to-day—there was an ugly——" She stopped, and bit her lip.

"An ugly what?" asked Glanvil, with a thrill of apprehension.

"Nothing," said she.

"Will you tell me?"

"You are angry!"

"It is all very odd," said he, making his voice cold.

And she melted at once. It was most miraculous that his power over her should be so complete. Other women had been subdued by that same voice, that same smile, and the beauty of Glanvil's face; but not one with such dizzy speed as Louise Carney.

"I should not say a thing about it," she pleaded. "I said that I wouldn't!"

"Hasn't one a right," he demanded, "to know when there are scandals buzzed about him?"

"But I didn't believe it!" she exclaimed.

"There *have* been scandals brought to you about me, then," said he.

"Ah," said Louise, "you mustn't ask!"

"Some coward has tried to poison your mind against me!"

"No. You mustn't call Jack Rutledge a coward—you mustn't call him that!"

"Rutledge!" exclaimed Glanvil, in much the same tone that he would have used to say: "Fate!"

"It was only a humor that came to him."

"But he brought you the rumor?"

"You see, Jack is very fond of me. Very! He has been more than a brother to me! And so, when he heard this ugly thing, for my sake—he—he came up and told me. And—oh, I should never have let you know!"

The cold thrills of fear were working like snakes up and down the back of Glanvil.

"What did he tell you?"

"I can't tell."

"You must! What did he say?"

"I gave him my word—I can't—I can't!"

Inwardly he groaned. But he must have the thing out, certainly, and bestow on her new-gained information the light of his own clever explanations. Otherwise the things she had heard were apt to grow into rooted beliefs. He must kill them while the plants were tender and young in her credence. He replaced the hat on his head.

"I have to leave you," he said gloomily. "I'll come back, I trust, later."

So he turned on his heel and made off toward the gate.

There was no sound behind him. Would she let him go, and without a single word of question? If so, he was lost; but he had to keep on. All was surrendered if he faltered, or turned back to her. No, the heavens be praised! There was a scurry of feet behind him; there was a rustling of clothes like the flutter of a bird's wings. Now she was beside him, holding his arm.

"What are you going to do? Winsor, Winsor, what are you going to do?"

He fairly trembled with the relish of what he was about to say.

"I am going to this Jack Rutledge," he said. "I am going to ask *him* to repeat what he has heard about me. And if he will not—I'll tear it from his dastardly throat!"

It was magnificently delivered. The hot joy of that heroic speech made even Winsor Glanvil, for the moment, a hero indeed. He would almost have welcomed the conflict—his soft hand against the Herculean might of the man of the mountains.

Louise Carney was in a dreadful panic. "You must not go!" she gasped out at him. "You don't know—Jack Rutledge——"

"I've heard of him, and his bear killing. But do you think that an honest man fears any rascal in the world?"

"Winsor——"

"Let me go. I *must* find him!"

He broke away and actually gained the gate. But his hurry was half hearted enough to permit her to overtake him there. She drew him around; she made him face her. If she had had only the half of her strength it would have been enough to compel him.

"For Heaven's sake, Winsor! I'm fainting! I'll die with terror if you leave me to——"

"Will *you* tell me, then?"

"Only if you *swear* you will not face Jack with what he has said."

"I cannot promise that. It is not honorable for a man to allow another to——"

"Oh, not for the sake of your honor—but for my sake——"

He felt, then, that she could not have spoken words more perfect for his part if he had himself composed them for her. Slowly he allowed himself to melt.

"For your sake, Louise," he said with the deepest meaning, "I admit that I cannot refuse. But you are asking for my honor!"

"I swore to him that I would never repeat what he told me. Because he admitted that he was not sure——"

"He came to you with such talk before he himself was sure of the truth of it?"

"It was only because he was in a terrible fear about me, Winsor——"

"Fear? What is threatening you?"

"He thought—I can't put it into words——"

"But you must!"

"I am too ashamed!"

"Louise, for the sake of my honor—my self-respect, which you have dragged in the dirt——"

"No, no!"

"It is true! No other person in the world could have done so much with me!"

He saw her start at that and look hastily up to him; and he saw a wild light of joy flicker across her eyes.

"You must tell me, Louise. What did he fear for you?"

"I am ashamed, Winsor!"

"Ah, Louise, think how you have already shamed me?"

"It was—how can I say it?"

"But you will!"

"You will not laugh?"

"Laugh?"

She whispered: "He thought—that there was a danger—he was very foolish about it, of course—that if—that you—I mean that in case I were to—to—to marry some one—if I were to marry you——"

She stopped, crushed with shame. And then, feeling the chill of the silence, as he intended that she should feel it, she threw up her head and cried to him: "He had heard that you were a—a fortune hunter, Winsor. And he begged me not to—how can I say it?"

"A fortune hunter!" repeated Glanvil, as one dazed with horror and bewilderment. "A fortune hunter!"

And he struck the back of his hand across his eyes.

"You won't think that I let him suspect——" she began. "That you really cared for me? I told him that we hardly

knew one another; that you cared no more for me than for——" Her voice was trembling so that it fell away and he could hardly hear her.

"That is not true," said Glanvil, stepping readily into a breach so wide. "Heaven knows that after such a thing as this I can never speak. But if it had not been for this, I could have told you, dear——"

What a child, what a child she was! At that single word, her head went back, and the warm flush of her joy ran over throat and face, and her lips parted, and she tilted in toward him and clung to him.

"Winsor, Winsor!" she was saying. "There is no Jack Rutledge. I have never heard him speak of you. If he brought ten thousand men to swear against you, I wouldn't believe anything —except that I want to hear——"

"I love you, Louise. No matter what cowards dare to say about me, nothing can change that. I tell you that, and I wish to Heaven that you were the poorest girl that ever stood in a cottage door. But because you are rich, and because they have dared to say that I——"

"But I love you, Winsor. Their talking cannot change that. I have always loved you from the first day. It was just as though you had taken me in the palm of your hand."

CHAPTER VII.

FEARING A BLIND GIRL.

WHEN he reached the hotel, and that was the late dark of the twilight, with night itself close by, he went straight to Santelle. He found that worthy nervously pacing up and down his room. So wrought up was Santelle that he did not even wait to hear the news his companion might be bringing. He simply broke out with his own swelling emotion.

"Rutledge has been here. Everything is too late, and the devil take both of us and our plans!"

"Rutledge?" asked Glanvil, feeling his dreams of millions shrink to nothing on the spot. "Rutledge was here? What did he say?"

"Everything. And he said it in one minute, at the most. The incarnate devil knows all that he needs to know about the pair of us!"

"He can't," groaned Glanvil, still clinging to his dream. "He's only had four days——"

"He used the telegraph. He sent out for news—and he got it. He had the sheriff on the job, too. I don't know what corners they got in touch with. They only have a couple of chapters about each of us, but those chapters are enough. They know about your engagement with the Purchas girl, and how it was broken."

"Damnation!"

"He told me that we have until to-morrow morning to start out of town. That's the end of my story!"

"We have until to-morrow!" echoed Glanvil.

"To get out of town; and if we're still here by noon—he'll answer for it that we have tar and feather as much as will stick to our skins!" And Santelle made a grimace. "I had it once before in Louisiana, just outside of New Orleans. I'll never forget it! Ever happen to you, my friend?"

The face of Glanvil turned crimson with rage and with scorn and with shame.

"You may as well ask me, or any Glanvil, if I have passed through death," said he.

"Proud?" said Santelle, with his peculiar, twisted grin. "My dear Glanvil, a fox should never try the rôle of a lion! Never! Now we are to pack our grips."

"As soon as you please," said Glanvil. "Good-by now; I'm too busy to wait for your start."

"Busy? Just what is up your sleeve?"

"Nothing of importance, except that Louise Carney shall be married to me before midnight, if all goes as we have planned!"

Santelle cast up both hands, as one giving thanks to heaven. "You are miraculous, Glanvil!"

"Not at all. We simply reached an agreement, egged on by the fool, Rutledge."

"Egged on by him!"

"Exactly; for he tried to interfere and the result was a stormy scene. I became heroic and threatened to go tear Mr. Rutledge into bits. This excited her. She begged me to let him live a while. At last I consented and a little later agreed to marry her this very night—the early marriage being her way of showing that she doesn't believe in the truth of the rumors that Rutledge brought to her about me."

"Is it possible?"

"It is finished. I have to find the minister. That is all."

"I already know the place——"

"You have one located?"

"Exactly."

"Santelle, you have your uses. It must not be in this town, however."

"Certainly not. This is too close to the lion's den. But ten miles away, in a corner of the mountains, there is a crossroads village and a parson who'll make you man and wife. Until the gentle Mr. Rutledge——"

"I shall take care of him."

"If you are fast enough to get out of the country——"

"Man, man, I can guard myself. I am not helpless. I simply detest violence. That is all."

"Exactly," said Santelle, with the usual smile with which he greeted sham or fraud in his companion. "You will knock him down—and then break him in two!"

"Strength of hand is only a small part," said Glanvil. There are more deadly ways of striking."

"A knife, of course, when a man is looking the other way."

"A knife, of course, when a man is looking, let us say, flung from the flat of the hand——"

"Can you do that? I have seen a Mexican, but I didn't know that you had such accomplishments."

"Or a gun," said Santelle.

"Ah? But Rutledge is a famous gun fighter, Glanvil. You wouldn't risk as much as that?"

"The reason that I am not a famous gun fighter, Santelle, is that I have not lived where gun fighting is an accepted social accomplishment, but when the time comes, I shall not be found wanting."

Santelle shook his head.

"We are very understanding friends," said he, "but I wish that you would understand that I am a little more intelligent than you seem to believe. I tell you, Rutledge is an inescapable demon in a fight. You must not risk an encounter. If not for the sake of your hide, for the sake, then, of the money I expect to make out of this affair."

"I tell you, Santelle, to meet Rutledge would give me only the very greatest pleasure."

"Man, man—when do you practice with weapons, if you are so expert with them?"

"I don't need it. Let me tell you, Santelle, one is born with the power to kill or without that power. It is my birthright, and I have not used it. But if Rutledge pushes me too hard, he and I shall clash."

Santelle stared as though the soul of his companion were dressed with a new body before his eyes.

"I believe that you mean it!" he said. "On my honor, I believe that you mean it! But the clash has to be avoided. We will need fast horses for the ride."

"She has two beauties in her stable. We leave in three hours—as soon as she has gone up to her room. And—whisht—listen to that wind! This will be a true storm in a little time."

The wind had risen suddenly, and, putting out a strong hand, cuffed the windows until they jingled like castanets.

"Weather is nothing," said Santelle. "A wet bride is as good as a dry one, if she has eight millions in her pocket! I'll tell you the road to follow. Then I'll ride on ahead and have the minister ready for the job. Take the eastern road straight on past the Carney house. It winds along for two miles. Then there's a fork and a dim trail goes straight on. Keep to the main path to your right. You come to a crossroad in another mile. Take the left-hand turn. That will carry you straight north and into this wind, if it keeps on blowing. You'll pass the light of a house on the right and two more on the left. Then, seven miles from the crossroad, you will see the lights of the town in a hollow beneath you. Keep straight on through the village. Beyond the town there is a little church and opposite the church is an old house. That is where the minister lives. Can you remember this?"

"Every word."

"Now, what next?"

"A little sleep, Santelle."

"The devil! Can you sleep at a time like this?"

"Why not? I may need strength."

"If Rutledge gets wind of what's up——"

"It will be better for him to keep out of the business."

Saying this, Glanvil went to his suit case and took out a silver-mounted revolver, which he handled a moment, and then dropped into his clothes.

"I have not carried a gun," he mused, "since I was in Naples. Now I'm going to sleep for two hours. Do your part, Santelle, and I'll do mine. Good night!"

He lay down on the bed and turned his back on his companion.

"Your plans afterward?" asked Santelle.

"After the marriage, we keep on riding for the nearest railroad station. At that place, we take the first train East. And from the East, we are going on the first boat to France."

"I shall join you," returned Santelle, grinning, "in Paris. In the meantime, sweet dreams, my dear Glanvil."

"I shall dream a nightmare of a blind girl," said Glanvil. "It is she I fear—not Rutledge!"

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

CANDLES ON THE DESERT

OUTSIDE the town of Tucson, Arizona, on the edge of the desert, there is a mound topped by a rude cross. About the mound candles are burned night and day. It is said they have never been extinguished in forty years. A mass of candle grease, fully three feet high, is a mute witness to the unquestioned fact that many candles must have been burned here. The mound marks the spot where a Mexican named Jesus Molina plunged a dagger into Manuel Olivan. The slayer gave himself up to the law and was sent to Yuma Prison for life. Later he was pardoned through the good offices of the firm for which he worked. It is said that candles have been burned on the spot ever since "by those who desire any good luck to befall them, or any wish to come true." The mound of candle grease, with the burning tapers, is a strange sight on the edge of the desert, and strangers always pause to wonder.

At High Pressure

By Joseph F. Hook

THE big centrifugal pump throbbed and roared as it forced the water up high onto the dam where the giant monitors washed the dirt against the corewall. The powerful electric motor, directly connected to the pump, whined or purred as the pressure increased or decreased. And over these two pieces of expensive machinery a man bent anxiously, a piece of oily waste in his hand.

He was an old man. His hair was almost snow white, and his face, in spite of the anxious gaze, was a kindly one. He was stockily built, though stoop shouldered. His hands, however, were more like those of a woman than a man. The long, tapering fingers suggested the musician and not the workman. And yet those fingers were both strong and remarkably sensitive. They were, in fact, his stock in trade. They made him the expert pump operator he was; for, with them, he could detect the slightest difference in the temperature of a bearing, thus warning him of approaching trouble.

For three years, thanks to his almost uncanny knowledge of the machinery under his care, and those sensitive fingers, the big pump had never once broken down on his shift. For this reason the engineer in charge trusted him absolutely, and very rarely came near the pump house.

But things were far different with the other two operators who worked the swing and graveyard shift. They knew little about the machinery and, what was worse, cared less. Under their careless hands hot boxes developed like regular epidemics. Then the usual procedure with them was to shut down and send for the old man.

And when he came he invariably cursed them; cursed them and their ancestry clear back to Adam and home again.

"You ain't worth the powder to blow you straight up!" he would shout at them. "Pumps? Oh, Lord! The only pumps you guys knows anything about is them there things you put air into tires with."

They never offered to help him. They knew better. As a rule they sneaked away to the coffee shack and stayed there until the water again roared and whistled from the nozzles of the monitors.

"That old guy's nuts on pumps," they would say. "That's all the old fool knows or talks about. Nobody knows

nothin' about pumps but him, to hear him tell it."

To a certain extent what they said was true. The old man talked of pumps, read about pumps, and had vivid dreams of some day turning out a pump of his own that would startle the world.

Pictures of many kinds of pumps hung on the walls of the pump house. In the desk were several books on the subject of electrically driven pumps. In his spare time the old man was forever pottering about the machine shop working on the model of that pump that was to startle the world, and to which no mechanic paid the slightest attention, taking it for granted that it was but a mass of junk put together by a plain nut.

Pressure was a byword with him. If any one asked him a question about the big pump, which wasn't often, he answered willingly enough, but always managed to get off a regular lecture on pressure. So it wasn't very long before he became known to every man on the dam as "High Pressure." And the name stuck.

The monitor men and the dump men knew the value of high pressure behind the water. Without it the dirt could not be washed into place, and had a habit of piling up and then caving—a dangerous state of affairs in the construction of a dam of the type they were building. High Pressure knew this too, and no one had reason to complain on his shift, which was anything but true of the other shifts.

Nevertheless, the boys, knowing how touchy the old man was about his beloved pressure and pump, never could quite resist the temptation to get him going. Their method was to ring him up on the phone at the coffee shack.

"That you, High Pressure?" one of them would ask.

"Yes," the old man would answer, "What you want?"

"More pressure."

"More pressure! Hell's bells! What you think I am, eh? A danged compressor?"

The season was the dryest the entire Pacific coast had experienced in the memory of the oldest settler. Rain suddenly became a thing of the past, and stayed so for months. The grass in the forest shriveled up and turned brown at a season of the year when grass ordinarily was green and anything but dry. Gushing springs of wonderfully cool, clear water, hitherto of dependable and ample flow, turned to a tiny trickle and soon petered out entirely.

From one end of the coast to the other, and from many of the inland states, came word of forest fire after forest fire. Thousands upon thousands of acres of forest were being converted into blackened ruin by the fires raging through them. Each day brought news of fresh fires until the national forest service, driven to desperation, forbade campers to smoke pipe or cigarettes.

In spite of the most elaborate precautions, warnings, threatenings, and fines, campers could not or would not take the forest service seriously, and the next thing was an order closing the forests to every one except those having immediate business therein.

At the big dam, where High Pressure worked his pet pump, in the heart of the Rainier national forest reserve, men read of the fires and loss of life and property in their papers, and then gazed away into the distance and shuddered. Nothing but a brown carpet could be seen beneath the evergreen pines and firs. Most of them knew what that sinister color meant—dead, dry grass awaiting the match thrown from a careless hand.

Not a man showed the slightest sign of surprise when the fire siren on top of the compressor house split the silence of the night with its shrieking, howling call for help to fight the devastating monster with the thousand tongues of flame.

"I've been lookin' fer this fer some time," one of the men remarked as he dressed hurriedly. "It's a forest fire, all right. I ain't heard but the one call."

The men poured out of the bunk houses, dressing as they ran, and went in the direction of the machine shop. The big trucks, used for hauling supplies to the dam, were loaded with shovels, axes, and picks, their engines barking, their cut-outs open, their drivers ready.

The forest ranger was on the job and saw to the loading of the trucks. At his command a hundred men divided into squads of twenty-five and piled onto the four waiting trucks. Others who owned their own cars, drove up, got their directions from the ranger, then stepped on the gas and took the road that wound up and over the dam. After them roared the big trucks, with their heavy loads of humanity, at a much slower pace but, at that, driven faster than the manufacturer ever intended them to be.

The men, quite naturally, asked one another how the fire had started. From one man, who happened to be standing near the ranger when he ordered the fire siren blown, came the information.

When the grass turned brown and the danger of fire loomed big and near, the chief clerk, so it seemed, at the request of the forest service, sent "Alabama Slim" up above Camp Five to Indian Creek, to patrol. And with him went the smallest and yet the most powerful portable fire-fighting engine and pump over seen in the West. One man could could pick it up and carry it. But, in spite of its lightness and size, it was a giant in efficiency.

But, unknown to the chief clerk, Alabama Slim liked his little drink. At the end of his first week of patroling he took a little trip to town; and when he came back he was loaded inside and out. A lighted match, held too close to the neck of a bottle of high-powered white mule, did the trick.

The contents of the bottle exploded and shot liquid fire in all directions. Slim's tent, in which he batched, instantly became a furnace. The wind fanned the flames across the dry grass; and the screech of the fire siren was the result.

Before help could be brought to the spot, the whole country seemed to have been suddenly changed into a veritable inferno. The powerful little engine and pump, which had been placed close to the water's edge of Indian Creek, escaped. But the hose, hundreds of feet of it and all new, had gone up in smoke.

As fast as the trucks unloaded their human freight, the ranger placed them in command of a foreman and set them to work. They shoveled and picked a broad trail as close to the fire as they dare go, thus making a very efficient fire guard in case the wind turned. The axmen cut down brush and small trees along the dirt trail, giving the fire, should it swing back, no food to thrive on.

New hose was unloaded and attached to the tiny pumping outfit, and a mechanic was ordered to get the thing started in a hurry.

"I'll bet I can spit a better stream than that there dingus can throw," one man said contemptuously.

"I don't know so much about that," the ranger replied. "I ain't never saw her work, but them that has seen 'em other places, says they's the clear dope. The service ain't buyin' nothin' they don't know nothin' about, I'm here to tell you."

The mechanic tinkered and toiled. He placed the starting rope on the fly wheel, and pulled and pulled until the perspiration stood out on his forehead. But the engine remained as dead as the proverbial doornail.

"Git a hump on, for gosh sake!" the ranger shouted impatiently. "We've got to git through the outer edge of the fire

and to the other side. If we have to go around, it'll be too late."

Just then a man rode up at a fast gallop on a sweating, dust-stained horse.

"Hey!" he yelled at the ranger, reining in. "Jim Towner an' his wife an' two kids is trapped in that fire!"

"Trapped! Jim Towner!" the ranger gasped out.

"Yes—trapped. The wind's took the fire clear along Indian Creek, then down by Camp Five. She's made a complete circle, an' Jim's trapped in the middle!"

Suddenly the air was rent by a series of short, sharp explosions which immediately swelled into a roar. The mechanic had finally succeeded in getting the engine going. All eyes were riveted on the nozzle at the end of the hose.

The mechanic shot in the clutch that connected the engine to the pump, and the men yipped and cheered as the hose swelled from the rush of water through it.

But their cheering died down as suddenly as it had started. No water spouted from that much-watched nozzle. The little engine slowed down, coughed, gasped a few times, and died. Time and again the man started it up, only to have the same thing happen. Finally, in desperation, he threw up his hands and cursed.

"Somethin's got to be done," the ranger shouted, beside himself with anger. "Jim Towner's got to be got out of that fire; an' this pump's the only hope we got. She'll run. I know dang well she'll run. 'Tain't no use standin' there cussin'. That won't start her."

When the engine balked, the man had gathered around. All they talked about was Jim Towner and his family and the fate in store for them. They, too, knew that the little pump was their sole hope of breaking through that circle of fire to the rescue of the doomed ones.

"Ain't there nobody here what understands pumps?" the ranger inquired frantically.

"No, there ain't," the dump boss spoke up. "But there's old High Pressure—back there at the dam. He knows pumps. I've got me car here, an' I can git him in thirty minutes. What say?"

In less than the promised thirty minutes, High Pressure, white to the lips from the fastest ride he had ever had in his life, stood gazing down at the pump of his dreams. In that one glance he saw the experimenting, figuring, and planning of a lifetime gone forever. The little fire-fighting unit at his feet, no bigger than a fair-sized suit case, was the counterpart of the one he had slowly, carefully, painstakingly assembled in the machine shop, and which had passed for junk with the mechanics there.

The world had long since gone by and left High Pressure. Since he only read the daily paper and the few books he possessed on his beloved subject of pumps, a large firm, with its staff of trained engineers, had been quietly working on a portable, efficient pump for forest-fire service, and had, two years before the starting of the dam, put the outfit on an eager market.

High Pressure, of course, knew nothing of the *modus operandi* of engineering firms. All he knew was that some one, some cleverer brain than his, had solved the problem he had spent years on. He took it for granted that this man, whoever he was, had done the thing alone, unaided, short of the much-needed ready money—broke all the time, just as most inventors are.

Contrary to what one might expect, High Pressure felt nothing but respect for that other fellow—the lucky one. No jealousy found a place in his heart. Here, he thought, was another individual in the world who knew something about pumps. Hitherto he had, in his set, stubborn way, born of old age, fully believed he and he alone held the secret of the art of pumps and pumping. Now there was another; and he, in his heart, secretly expressed the hope that he would

some day meet him and shake his hand and have a good heart-to-heart talk on his pet subject.

High Pressure bowed to superior knowledge, gladly, willingly.

"Grab your hose, boys!" the dump boss yelled. "Old High Pressure's on the job! We'll sluice the devil outa things now!"

"Old man," the ranger said, "there's a man an' a woman an' two kids over there in that circle of fire. Their lives is in your hands. D'you think you can cut the mustard?"

"Who? Me?" High Pressure exclaimed, coming out of his reverie. "Git the devil outa here! You 'tend to your end o' the business, an' I'll 'tend to this. Savvy?"

High Pressure knew gas engines. In the old days they had been the chief power behind the pumps. One pull on the rope and the little engine burst into a roar. He eased in the clutch and the hose swelled.

"Dig in your toes, boys!" the dump boss yelled. "Here she comes! Pressure an' lots of it. Good ol' High Pressure!"

But his joy was short-lived. As before, the engine coughed, gasped, and died. Every eye turned on the old man, and not a word was spoken as they saw him bend closely and lovingly over the pump, examining it carefully, wrench in hand.

"Who's been monkeyin' with this afore I come?" he demanded, straightening up.

"Me," the mechanic replied, a sneer on his face.

"I thought so!" the old man spluttered. "You guys drive me crazy. You know it all, you do. Nobody knows nothin', to hear you young squirts slop over at the mouth. Know what you've been a-doing, eh? You've been running that there pump with the relief valve screwed down tight, that's what you have! Better go back an' study book one of that there mail-order course you're takin'."

A moment's work with the wrench and High Pressure yanked on the starting rope. The engine roared and the hose swelled, and, amid the cheers of the men, water shot from the nozzle and fell hissing into the flames. But the cheer never reached the old man's ear. The roar of the engine drowned all noise. He glanced quickly at the stream of water, then divided his attention between the pressure gauge and the relief valve.

The gauge crept up to a hundred pounds and stayed there. Another half turn of the relief valve screw and the indicator shot around to the hundred and fifty mark. High Pressure squatted back on his haunches and breathed a sigh of relief. Past experience told him the little pump was working at its limit.

High Pressure gazed in ecstasy at the pulsing, throbbing, roaring pocket edition of power before him. Lovingly his hands, with those tapering sensitive fingers, felt the polished, painted surface of the engine, then instinctively wandered to the bearings. Not once did he glance up to see how the men were making it. That end of the business was not his; and he was a stickler for attending to his business and his business only.

"Say, High Pressure," the mechanic yelled in his ear, "the water ain't doin' no good. Too much pressure. She's all spray."

"Pressure, nothin'!" the old man shouted back. "It ain't the pressure. Don't you know what's wrong?"

"No."

"I thought so!" the old man shouted, slapping his thigh and laughing in a high, shrill tone. "They must've forgot to put that in that there course you're studyin'. Have you got another nozzle an' a hack saw?"

"Sure."

'Then saw off about two inches of the nozzle, so's to let the water out; then

I'll shut down while you put it on in place of the other one. Hole's too small, that's all."

The change was soon made and the outfit started again. The change in nozzles enabled the men to get closer to the fire and make better and faster headway with the flames.

Suddenly, for just a few moments, the wall of flame lifted and, in the distance, veiled in the smoke, the men made out the figures of Jim Towner and his family, huddled together. Then the flame and smoke closed in and shut them from view.

A big lumberjack stepped away from the hose and walked over to the frantic ranger.

"Did you see them?" the ranger almost sobbed.

"Sure I see them," the lumberjack replied. "That's what I came to see you about. No use losing yer shirt thet a way, boss. Got to git inter action. Me an' me buddy's goin' in after 'em."

"You—you are what!" the ranger exclaimed. "Are you bugs? There ain't no man livin', 'cept he was made of asbestos, could go through that and live."

"Bunk! Where d'you git that asbestos stuff? I been through wuss than that."

"Look! Look!" Even as the ranger spoke, the top of a huge pine, a blazing torch, fell with a crash, tearing off the lower branches as though they were matches, and flinging sparks and burning fragments of wood far and wide.

The ranger shouted: "That's hell with the lid off!"

"That?" the lumberjack sneered. "Why, that's a picnic to what I've faced. I ain't goin' to stand here an' watch no woman and kids burn up, see? Me and me buddy an' ol' High Pressure's goin' to turn the trick. You watch my smoke."

"An' your ashes, too, you fool!" the ranger replied, more in pride than anger.

The lumberjack beckoned to his buddy, and the two men went to one of the trucks and took four gunny sacks each. Then they went to the creek and soaked them in the water. With the aid of nails, they fastened the sacks tightly around their necks. In others they cut holes for their eyes and pulled them over their heads. With a dripping sack in either hand they walked under the hissing water from the hose, as near to the fire as they dared, and paused, waiting their chance, letting the spray fall over them.

Suddenly the wall of flame lifted again, and just as suddenly the two men rushed. The next instant they were swallowed up in the dense smoke and lost to sight. The man at the nozzle kept the water swinging in a wide arc where the men had disappeared.

When the two made their rush, the rest of the men stopped work and stared, dumfounded, their hearts in their mouths, waiting for a sight of the others returning, and yet, deep down in their hearts, fearing the worst.

The ranger acted like a man possessed. The thought of the horrible death the two men had rushed into, and the period of anxious waiting, drove him frantic.

"It's my fault," he muttered. "I hadn't oughta've let 'em do it. I never thought they'd git through. I'll never fergive myself for this."

A gust of wind swept around the bend of the cañon and fanned the flames down low. Before they could reach up again, at the spot where the two men had plunged through, the water cascaded on to it from the hose, and a cloud of steam and smoke arose.

"You've done it!" the ranger yelled, jumping up and down. "You've caught it just right. Now hold her steady and don't let her git started there again."

And then, through the wall of steam and smoke, a man staggered with a child under each arm, and close behind him, half supporting, half dragging a woman came the big lumberjack. Bringing up the rear was Jim Towner.

A great cheer went up from the men as they raced forward to lend a hand.

"Cut out the cheerin', boys," the lumberjack panted, flinging himself on the ground. "If you want to let off steam, whoop it up fer ol' High Pressure. He was the man behind the gun. We'd never have got back if that there pump had quit on him. She was sure hell in there!"

The ranger led the cheering. The men faced about in the direction of the pump, and the sound of their voices echoed and reëchoed up and down the cañon.

But their cheers were wasted as far as High Pressure was concerned. He could hear nothing above the roar of the engine. Those cheers, for which many would have given ten years of their life, passed over his head and were fanned away on the wind. For the first and last time in his life High Pressure was an acclaimed hero, and didn't know it, and, doubtless, would have been rather peeved if he had known it.

He was still squatted on his haunches, his eyes steadily fixed on the pressure gauge, his hand fingering the relief valve. He was coaxing every ounce of pressure out of the pump, and nothing else mattered.

When he felt two soft, warm arms steal gently round his neck, and saw a woman's tear-stained, soot-blackened face close to his, he straightened up in alarm.

"God bless you, old man!" the woman sobbed, clinging to him. "You saved our lives."

"Who? Me?" High Pressure asked in astonishment. "Why, I ain't done nothin', lady. Somebody else done that. All I did was to 'tend to my end o' the business."

Just as the sobbing, thankful woman planted a kiss on the wrinkled, weather-beaten face of the old man, Jim Towner came up to him.

"High Pressure," he said in a hoarse voice, "I'd like to shake hands with you, but I can't. My hands is nothin' but a mass o' smartin' blisters. But I can thank you fer what you done, since my tongue is about the only part of me that ain't fried to a frazzle."

"Aw, shucks!" High Pressure exclaimed, disengaging himself from the woman's arms. "I ain't done nothin'. This little ol' baby here did the trick. Say, mister, just take a look at her. Just look her over once. Did you ever see such a powerful little cuss in your life before?"

He was no longer embarrassed now. Here was a man, not a woman; and he could talk to a man. He didn't know how to talk to a woman, not having had much experience along that line. Above the roar of the engine he pointed out to Jim the good points of the fire-fighting unit, and the places where, he felt sure, improvements should be made.

When at length, the ranger, happy once again, came to take Jim back to the dam for medical attention, he heard the old man shout in the other's ear:

"There ain't much to her, mister, but I'll be danged if she ain't got the world skinned when it comes to high pressure."

ON THE EDGE OF THE FOREST

AT Vesper, Oregon, on the edge of the forest, there is a unique church building. It is a private church, for it was built by and for the Johnston family. In 1876 William Johnston and his wife cleared a homestead in the timber. One of their first efforts was to secure a little cabin for prayer and worship. To-day they and their thirty-five descendants hold private services in their private chapel every Sunday.

The Coyote

By R. L. Beardsley

GUESS they ain't no one that likes him,
'Cause he's such an awful pest.
He's the tyrant o' the prairie
An' the vandal o' the West;
He's the foe of all us rangers
An' the terror o' the herd;
He is sure enough unpopular
With man an' beast an' bird.

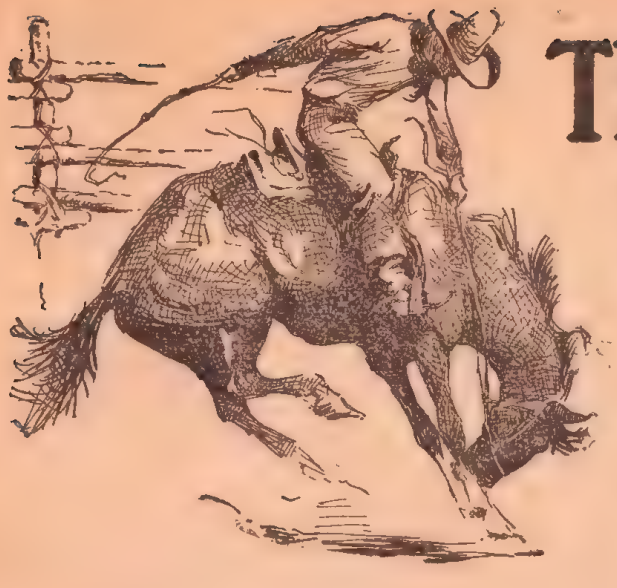
He goes sneakin' 'crost the prairie,
Sort o' slinky, slaty gray,
With his ears stuck up before him,
In a mighty knowin' way.
He slides in behind the bunch grass;
You jest see him, an' he's gone;
But, if you count your cattle up,
You'll find you're minus one.

When you wake up in the nighttime,
An' you hear his barkin' laugh,
You are pretty safe in bettin'
He's been up an' stole a calf.
When the moon is shinin' brightly,
An' he solos on the hill,
You have jest one great ambition—
That's to get right up an' kill.

He's so much about his business,
You can't git him with a gun;
An' I've set for him a hundred traps,
But he missed 'em every one.
Ain't no use to waste your poison,
Baitin' beefsteak fer the cur;
You can't git him by such measures;
He acts like they never were.

Yet, somehow, I know I'd miss him
If he wasn't on the plain;
I would miss his moon light music
With its melancholy strain;
I would miss that hungry feller,
With the rollin' rovin' eye;
For he's part o' the old prairie,
Where I want to live an' die.

W2C



The Third Bullet

By

Max Brand

Author of "Chick's Fall," etc.

CHAPTER I.

INGRATITUDE.

IT was already the afterglow of the sunset time before Christopher Ballantine topped the hill that gave him a view of the house. He had no more than time to ride in, unsaddle, and wash, before supper would be on the table, but when he looked into the next hollow, in the muddy margin of the sun-shrunk "tank," he saw the head and horns of a badly bogged cow. This work should not have fallen to him. His brother, Will, back from college for the summer or for as great a part of it as he could endure, had been directed to ride the range near the house, and if he had acted according to his duty, he must have seen this bogged cow. But Will, as usual, had been playing truant.

A little flush of anger appeared in the face of Christopher. But it disappeared at once. He was too accustomed to doing his share of the work, and another share besides. He merely turned the head of his horse and rode down to the tank, making excuses for Will on the way. For, after all, when a boy comes back from college full of his athletic deeds on track and football field, full of tales of college eminence, clean-handed, high-headed, it is hard to put him on the range riding at the heels of stupid "doggies." No wonder that he had broken off work early.

Christopher Ballantine was used to making such excuses, both for his younger brother and his still younger sister. For, when his father died ten years before, Chris at the age of eighteen had naturally stepped into the vacant place as the head of the family. Sylvia was only nine. Will was barely eleven. To those motherless and fatherless children, it seemed that the world owed special care to make up for their orphaned lives. And Chris Ballantine had taken that duty on himself, gladly, with a heart swelling with high determinations. He had put them both into schools. Now, with Sylvia at nineteen and Will at twenty-one, the elder brother could say with pride that they had been educated as well as any millionaire's children in the country.

If both of them had been pampered into pride and laziness, he dared not open his eyes to that fault, for the education of the two was the only result of the ten years of slavery which Chris

W3C

Ballantine had just passed through. A series of disasters had swept over the ranch. At first they were caused by his inexperience, both in raising cattle and in marketing them. Afterward, when he learned the hard lessons which he needed to know, bad luck dogged him. Whatever he did went wrong. Three years before, blackleg had come like a curse on the place. The ranch had never recovered, and, left without a cent of incumbrance at the death of the father, the place was now heavily mortgaged. However, this was the price which had been paid for the education of the youngsters, and the elder brother felt more than repaid. It was therefore that he dared not open his eyes to their faults. For it simply meant opening his eyes to his own failure.

He rode down to the tank and set to work on the cow. First he unslipped his rope and shot the noose skillfully over the horns of the steer. But when the pony pulled the rope taut, it was plain that the steer was so deeply worked into the mud that its neck would break before it was drawn clear.

He had to ride right to the edge of the firm land. First he pulled at the horns of the bogged animal until its fore quarters were drawn up a little. Then he passed the tail over the pommel of the saddle and made the snorting cow pony heave up the hind quarters. When that was accomplished, he took another pull on the rope. This time the steer drew clear, slowly, with infinite tugging. For it let its exhausted body lie as a dead weight, hopeless, until it was in a half-leg depth of the mud. Then, discovering that it had a chance for life, it recovered its strength in a rush, plunged out of the tank, and made at Chris with lowered horns. There was barely enough agility left in the legs of the weary pony to avoid that rush.

And while the rescued steer galloped clumsily away, the rancher turned back toward the house, littered with mud, but profoundly thankful. So sadly had the herd diminished that the loss of a single steer was a heavy blow.

All of this made him late for supper, and when he had finished washing up and scraping mud, the cook met him with a significant shrug of the shoulders as he passed through the kitchen.

"They couldn't wait," said she, jerking a thumb over her shoulder toward the dining room.

Ballantine flushed again. It was very hard that they could not delay their supper half an hour on his account! He had to pause at the door of the dining room, for an instant, before he went in. But, when he appeared, he managed to be wearing a cheerful smile. They were down to coffee and cake. But as for an apology, it did not occur to them that one was needed. Sylvia merely nodded wearily toward him, and then looked at the mud stains with which he was covered.

"Well," said Will, "been day dreaming again? You're an hour late!"

He was too tired to be angry. His plate was brought in from the kitchen, covered with cold, soggy food. And he started eating with no appetite.

"There was a cow in the tank just over the hill," said Ballantine. "Me and the hoss had a tussle pullin' it out."

"You and the which?" asked Sylvia.

"Me and the hoss, of course."

"'Hoss?'" said Sylvia, arching her brows. "'Hoss?'"

"What's the matter?"

Will and Sylvia exchanged glances.

"It's no use," said Will. "The habits are fixed on him by this time."

"But good heavens, Christopher," said his sister, "I should think that you could make some effort."

"To do what?" asked Ballantine blankly.

"To talk as if the English language were something more than a cowpuncher's lingo, Christopher."

He stared at her for a moment. She looked very pretty with this flush of indignation in her cheeks, and with her eyes bright with anger and scorn. He felt a little stab of wonder then, as he had often felt it before, that this lovely girl could actually be his sister. She was like dew touching his dusty life. And again he swallowed the faint beginnings of anger at her rebuke.

"Well, sis," he said, "maybe I don't talk the way Shakespeare wrote. I ain't got the time to think about such things."

"Why?" she asked insistently.

"Why? Because it takes work to run a ranch like this, sis."

"Does it? Yes, I suppose so—to run such a ranch properly."

He winced again; then he looked straight down at his plate, hoping that they would not see his rising color. But, from the corner of his eye, he could make out the malicious little smile and nod with which Will egged on his sister to the work of torment. That, surely, was hardly fair.

"I ain't gunna pretend to be the best rancher in the world, Sylvia," he said at last, mildly.

She said: "I was talking to Mr. Bannock this afternoon."

"You was? What did old Si have to say?"

"Old Si," she snapped out, "is a very successful operator in cattle, I believe."

"He's a lucky dog," admitted Christopher Ballantine. "Lucky, lucky dog!"

He was thinking of all the calamities which had dropped upon the ranch and upon his life. He did not see the small, dark dining room, only half lighted by the flame which quivered in the throat of the smoky lamp. He did not see the very table itself, with its oilcloth covering, and the heavy, chipped crockery with which it was covered. He was watching the years, the dead years behind him. As for the future, it would all be like this—work, weariness, despair, until Will Ballantine, with his well-schooled brain, made some brilliant business stroke and was able to set him up on a larger scale.

"Lucky?" Sylvia was saying. "Lucky, Christopher? Then I suppose that you've been only—unlucky?"

He started out of his dream. "What's that, sis?" he asked hurriedly. "What's that?"

And he leaned anxiously toward her, his elbows resting on the edge of the table, which threw back his wide shoulders and made the great, smooth-swelling muscles stand out across his back.

She did not answer him. She had turned a little pale; she was sitting stiffly in her chair; now, instead of regarding Christopher, she was staring straight at Will as one who would say: "I have started it; now come in and finish it. I can't go any further."

"Chris," said Will suddenly, pushing back his chair and turning a little upon his brother, "it was from Mr. Bannock that we heard some very important news to-day."

"I hope it ain't as bad as the way you look, Will."

"Maybe not bad to you. You seem to be accustomed to such things. But it seemed very bad to Sylvia and me. What he had to say was simply that there is another mortgage on the ranch!"

Christopher Ballantine twisted a little in his chair, with the stinging pain of that accusation. He shoved away his plate, for food had turned repulsive to him.

"Well, Sylvia," he murmured, "I guess that there ain't any other way out of it than to tell you about it all."

"I hope not," said the girl dryly. "I hope that we have a sufficient interest in the ranch to make it our *right!*"

In that cold remark there were so many implications, so many connotations, that Christopher simply dared not consider them. There was such a blank

and brutal accusation that he could not face it. His courage failed him utterly.

It was not from Sylvia alone. Another blow to match it came from the other side.

"After all," said Will, brought to the point by his sister's speeches, "one need not dodge the truth. Our share in the ranch is just as great as yours is, Chris. We're each a third owner."

"Did Bannock put that into your heads?" asked Ballantine.

"We'd had it in mind long ago. Even we could see how things were going on the ranch—though heaven knows you've never told us much!"

This was from Will again.

CHAPTER II.

FACING BRUTAL FACTS.

IT had come pouring down upon the head of Ballantine so swiftly and so without warning that he could not comprehend. All he knew was that he was in a great trouble, the greatest of his life. But still he refused to examine the truth as it was presented to him. To do that meant to see that he had thrown away ten years of his life, and no man can do such a thing as that lightly.

"I've told you all I thought that you needed to know," said Ballantine.

"I understand," broke in Will coldly, swelling with his suppressed anger, "that the ranch is now mortgaged for more than it would bring for cash in a quick sale."

"Bannock told you that?"

"Never mind who told me. Is it true?"

"I dunno," said Ballantine sadly. "Maybe it is. Maybe it is!"

"Oh, Chris!" cried the girl. "What have you done with the money? What have you done with it?"

His eyes widened as he looked back at her. What had he done with the money? And this from her?

"Why not make a clean breast of it all?" asked Will in his newfound, sharp-edged voice. "You've been playing the market or something like that, Chris. Come out and let's know the whole truth!"

Speech was impossible, and the head of Ballantine sank on his breast.

"You see?" said the girl with an eager savageness that made her older brother wince again. "He practically confesses. It's exactly as I thought. For where *could* it have gone? Heaven knows that *we* haven't cost the estate a great deal—just a little every year for our schooling. And while you had us out of the way, Christopher—while you were here as the absolute master of our ranch, what have you been doing?"

Ballantine rose from his chair and turned blindly toward the door.

"That won't do!" snapped out Will. "You mustn't sneak out like that. Stand up like a man and tell us the worst of it, Chris. Confession is good for the soul."

The light he was forced to face was a torture to him, but it was nothing compared with the savage intentness in the faces of the two before him.

"It's been just bad luck," he muttered.

"Not stupidity? Nothing *wrong* about anything? Just bad luck?" asked Sylvia through stiff lips.

"So that Sylvia, poor girl, and I—are to be beggared? In the very beginning of life—beggared!"

"I've done my best with the place," said Ballantine, hardly recognizing his own voice. "I swear I've done my best. But things have turned out bad!"

"Look here, Chris," said his brother, smashing his fist into the palm of his other hand, "these generalizations won't do! We have to know the truth and the whole truth."

"Will, when father died, somebody had to take charge. Who was there except me?"

"Who asked you to do it? Why

couldn't a competent man have been given the work? Heaven knows it would have paid us in the end!"

"Hush!" cried Sylvia. "There are tears in his eyes! There's no use talking to him now, Will."

So Ballantine was allowed to escape. He staggered through the kitchen, and in the withered, twisted, cunning face of the cook he could see that she had been listening and had overheard everything. And this, in turn, meant that the entire range would know about the scene in a week, at the most. For her busy tongue could never be still when it had such a theme as this to contend with.

He went out into the dark, breathing deeply, and he rested one hand against the corner of the house. Still, through the open window, their raised voices came shamelessly forth to him.

"By heavens, Sylvia, there *were* tears in his eyes!"

"Like a whipped puppy."

"He would have been blubbering in another moment."

"My heavens, is there no backbone in him? What a shameful thing to have in the family—to call brother!"

"Hush, Will!"

"What do I care if he hears? He's ruined my life—or come close to it. Can I enter a law firm this fall in New York and hold up my end socially without a penny to live on except the paltry two thousand a year that he sends me?"

"What about me, Will?"

"It's the devil of a situation for both of us, but a girl doesn't have to have so——"

"Will, you talk like a wild man! Doesn't have to have so much? Go into any decent shop on Fifth Avenue and see what clothes for a girl cost. I don't mean extravagant ones, but just plain frocks——"

"And fur coats like the one you bought last winter? Not extravagant?"

"Well, any one can tell you that a fur coat is a necessity in the East. They outwear simply *dozens* of cloth ones, and —you have a fur coat yourself!"

"I had to get it when Van Dyck Thompson asked me on that motor trip. That was a social opportunity I couldn't give up. You know that as well as I do! It's this soft-headed idiot who's been ruining the affairs of the family——"

But Ballantine could endure no more. He sneaked out to the haystack which stood behind the long cattle shed. Beside it he threw himself down on his back in the spill of chaff and hay which had dropped from the stack. There he lay, fighting the agony of grief and of shame which stormed through his heart, and watching the stars, and seeing them swirl into tangled lines of fire.

At length his vision cleared. The stars burned singly above him; his pulses stirred again with a regular beat. He arose and went into the house. He was perfectly calm when he came before the pair again.

"Now," he said, as they stared scowling at him, "I guess I got to put the cards on the table."

They looked at one another.

"It is only about ten years late, Christopher," said Sylvia. "But let's see what we have, by all means!"

"The Reddick bank has the mortgages. They'll tell you about them. But I want to tell you that I think Bannock was wrong. He wanted to buy that southeast half section last spring, and I wouldn't sell, because I wanted to keep father's place intact. Bannock has hated me ever since."

"The same size?" cried Sylvia. "A rotten shell with nothing in it! An oyster shell with the oyster gone. What good is that?"

"What good is that?" echoed Will.

The elder brother looked gloomily from face to face. There was no use trying to close his eyes to it now. The facts were thrust into his mind against

his will or with it. Their own voices were proclaiming them. They were equally vain, senseless. And this was the result of his ten years of work!

"Looks to me," said he, "that you both got some main line in mind. You got the law in mind, Will."

"I even have the firm lined up. Crazy to get me, so they say—I don't know why, of course. But they want me. One of the finest firms in New York. Ready for me this fall. But Heaven knows how I can do it on two thousand a year. Can you raise that to three thousand, Chris?"

"One minute, if you please!" put in the girl. "I suppose that I have *some* rights, or are the men in the family to have everything?"

"I want to know what you want, sis?" asked the older brother.

"I want six months," said Sylvia with a toss of her head. "I want six months to do my piece of work, and do it well. I'm not one of the old-fashioned, sentimental, milk-and-water girls. I'm twentieth century, thank the heavens! And I have wits enough to realize that there is only one thing that's worth while. It's the thing that the men are after—money! I can't earn it. But I can marry it! Christopher, I have the social footing established. I can meet money. And in six months I'll *marry* it and bring it home sewed up in a bag! But I need living expenses—five hundred a month is all I need for six months. If I don't win by that time, I give up all claims on the ranch!"

Ballantine could not look into her face. He could not look into his own soul, hearing such words from his own sister. But he thought of the ten years of his wasted young life, and an agony rose in him.

"I think," he said huskily, "that I can raise five thousand with a last mortgage. That would give twenty-five hundred to each of you. Is that a bargain?"

"A bargain!" cried Will. "If I don't make good in a year, I'll call myself a fool!"

"It's not enough," said Sylvia critically. "But I suppose that I could make it do! When do I get the money?"

"To-morrow, if the bank will close the deal with me."

"Good boy, Chris. Then we won't have to spend the rest of the summer on this damnable ranch! Go in the morning!"

Ballantine went out again into the dark. He sat on the chopping block and there rested his chin on his fist and tried to think, but could not. Sylvia came out to him and dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"Maybe we talked pretty straight, Christopher," she said. "But words don't draw blood!"

"Don't they?" murmured Ballantine.

"Of course not. You'll forget about all this in a month. But now I want to tell you, Christopher, that if you could give me three thousand and Will only two, it will really be worth while. Of course, when I marry, I don't intend to get some small fish out of the pond. I intend *millions,* Christopher. And after I have it, the purse will be open to you. You understand?"

In five minutes after she left, Will was with him.

"Of course I couldn't say anything while she was there without hurting her feelings. But really, Chris, you understand that twenty-five hundred for a girl is ridiculous. They're invited places. They don't have to pay for two, the way a man does. Fifteen hundred would be oceans for Sylvia. And besides, she won't have any tuition to pay this fall!"

CHAPTER III.

DISILLUSIONMENT.

HE dared not consult the evidence of his senses—of his ears which had drunk in the vain, cruel, selfish words of his brother and sister—of his eyes,

which had witnessed their sneering looks, their open contempt for him.

Through that night Ballantine sat in a deep dream, half sleeping, half waking, and, before the morning, he had crucified himself on the cross of self-abnegation.

For, he said to himself, what they declared was the truth. If he had been a clever rancher from the first, he could have made such a profit from the ranch that there would never have been any financial worries. And yet, during the past years, he had poured such a quantity of money upon the two, that he could not but doubt. They were a desert upon which a golden tide was visible only a moment before it sank from sight. They remembered now and spoke to him only of the actual cash allowance which he had made to them. But there were always extras. There were always bits which must be provided for. There were such things as the fur coat for Will before he made the automobile trip, and the fur coat for Sylvia on a similar occasion. Always they were pressing ahead, eager, insatiable, with their eyes bent upon a higher social position. And, after all, even with the best of times and the best of good management, it had never been a very great thing, this ranch.

It had kept Ballantine, his wife, and their three children, very comfortably, but the elder Ballantine had never contemplated anything so dashing as this project of sending the two younger offspring away to expensive private schools and then to great Eastern universities. A homely public school, a high school course, and then he would have sent them into the world. Too much education, he was fond of saying, was a poison for the mind.

Perhaps he was right. Perhaps, after all, in his desire to help them, Ballantine had simply ruined them. If they had received only what their own father thought best for them, they would have turned into very gentle, generous, open-hearted persons, but he, a boy of eighteen, had presumed to know better what they were fitted for. This was the result.

He had thrown away ten years of labor; he had poured forth all the efforts of his body and his brain for them; he had educated them perfectly; he had prepared them for advanced positions in the world; but at the same time he had ruined the ranch in so doing, and he had won not even their gratitude!

To be sinned against is infuriating; but to have the sinner fail to recognize his guilt is maddening. But Ballantine was not maddened. Going patiently over the affair, he decided that, after all, he was so deeply in the wrong that he must not strike back. He must never strike back, indeed! His hands were tied. The world was his creditor.

He went to bed, at last, in the early morning, and by that time, in his exhausted brain, there remained only a dim wonder—a wonder that God could permit a man to struggle so desperately, so honestly, and with so little effective gain!

He was soundly asleep only two hours when he was wakened, without the need of an alarm clock, by the flood of the earliest morning light. He got up at once, bathed, and dressed. Then he went down to the kitchen where the cook had not yet arrived, ate a slice of bread and butter, drank a glass of milk, and was ready to work until noon!

He took a mild comfort in that knowledge of his own peerless physical resources. He could do the work of two or three men and he could keep it up from dawn to dark. Exertion did not weary him, apparently, and by the immense labors of these last ten years, his tremendous natural strength had been turned into flexible steel. He was clad with the powers of a giant. And now, in the beginning of this day, as he hurried forth to the corrals, he thought of

his strength with a faint glow of satisfaction.

Presently he had saddled and mounted a horse. Only when he was forced to ride to town did the pinch of penury really torment him, but when the pinch came, it was a bitter thing. He had only one passion, and that was the love of horseflesh. To have controlled some dancing, high-headed, fire-eyed stallion, trembling with speed and with deviltry, would have been a perfect delight to him. But he could not afford such a luxury as this. He must content himself with a string of common nags, greatly overworked, grudging the pitiful amount of work which they were forced to drag through, and always ungrateful to the eye. He picked out a tough roan on this morning. It was the ugliest of all his string, but it was also the strongest, and therefore it had endured the labors of the spring and summer better than the rest of the horses. At the present moment, taking condition into consideration, it was much the most pleasing to the eye.

On this he trotted away toward the town. He would have liked to have his horse bounding away at full speed, rushing hard against the bit. But he was forced to content himself with this plebeian dog trot. It covered the ground slowly. The sun rose higher. The withering heat began. The sweat began to start out of the body of the roan. The stench of his perspiration was ever in the nostrils of his rider. And still he worked patiently on.

He paused at mid-morning, fighting a fierce temptation in his blood. Then he swerved irresolutely to the side and entered a by-lane off the main road. It carried him to a pasture behind a big house on a hillside, a house pleasantly shrouded with trees, with huge barns and sheds with painted roofs, spread over the lower hollow. The Holbrook place was famous over the entire range for its beauty and for its comforts. And here, by lucky chance, were the two people whom he loved more than he loved any others in the world. Old Tom Holbrook, in spite of his wealth, had never held him away at arm's length, and Peggy Holbrook was to Ballantine all that is delightful, all that is serenely sweet in womanhood. He did not love her; he worshiped her.

They were standing under the poplars by the edge of the pasture, watching the big stallion, "Overland." It was Ballantine himself who had named the horse when Mr. Holbrook bought the animal as a two-year old, for the sake of ultimately improving the breed of his saddle horses. Because, as Ballantine had said when he first saw the horse run through the fields, he went like the overland itself, with an eye of fire, a rush of thundering hoofs, and blinding speed that made the fluid miles pour behind him.

They were sufficiently gloomy. When Ballantine came up, they greeted him with a sigh and a nod.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "Has something happened to Overland?"

The stallion heard that voice uttering his name and wheeled suddenly in the pasture with a snort, tossing up his shining black head, and then along the sleekness of his side, Ballantine saw the dark impress where a saddle had recently rested and where the sweat had gathered under the blanket.

"You see, dad?" said the girl.

"See what?" snapped out Mr. Holbrook in a very evil temper.

"The way he answers when Chris speaks. Chris can even call, and he'll come! I've seen it!"

The rancher grunted. "How the devil have you managed that?" he asked.

"Oh, I have the time," said Christopher Ballantine. "Time ain't much to me, you know. I only use up about twenty-four hours a day. The rest of the time I'm over here with Overland."

"It's not the time he spends with Overland. It's his way. You know, dad, that there's only one man really, for every girl; and there's only one master, really, for every horse."

"Bosh!" said the rancher. "Infernal bosh! But tell me, Chris, can you actually make that high-headed fool come to you?"

For answer, Ballantine stepped to the fence and whistled. The stallion hesitated. Then he came with a mincing step, uncertain but eager, toward Ballantine.

"This is strange!" exclaimed Holbrook. "Mind yourself, man, or he'll take your head off!"

Ballantine grinned, and, turning his back on the approaching horse, faced Holbrook as he answered.

"There's no danger. He won't harm me."

The horse, in fact, coming up behind Ballantine, offered him no harm whatever, but reaching over the fence began to nose at his coat pockets, and finding nothing there to his liking, he put one ear back in anger and one forward with a glint of coltish mischief in his eye. Then he twitched off the hat of Ballantine with a touch of his long, prehensile upper lip.

"You see, dad! Just what I told you!" cried Peggy Holbrook.

"A remarkable thing!" repeated he. "What have you done to the brute in this month while I was away?"

"I've come over near every night. That's all. And he's used to me. Patience is all it takes."

"Patience? Patience?" shouted Mr. Holbrook. "Bah! I've wasted two years on that idiot. No, sir, there's something odd in this! I suppose you'll be riding him one of these days?"

"Whenever you please," said Ballantine.

"Ha?"

"Chris!" cried the girl. "You don't mean——"

He was already through the fence.

"Don't, Chris!" she warned him. "You're mad. Why, Charlie Pickett was here only an hour ago, and he lasted just a minute and a half on Overland!"

"Look at what he did!" answered Ballantine, shaking his head.

He pointed to welts along the flank of the stallion.

"The fool was fighting Overland; I'd as soon fight a nest full of tigers!"

"How would you manage to ride him, then?" asked Holbrook, scowling. "Let me see what you'd do. There's a saddle and bridle in the shed, yonder. Don't let that hold you back!"

"Chris!"

This from the girl in an accent of very real alarm.

"There's not a bit of danger," he said. "Not a bit. You see?"

He was still speaking when he laid hold on the mane of the big horse, made a short step beside him, and then swung onto his back. Upon the face of Mr. Holbrook appeared mingled horror and bewilderment. And the girl turned pale and doubled up her fists like a frightened child.

"Oh, Overland, good boy!" she whispered. "Don't hurt him!"

Overland tossed up his head, and by that gesture turned himself into a giant. He was a full sixteen hands and two inches, fitly limbed and fitly muscled for that height. He could have pulled a plow and looked fit for that work, from the bulging might of his quarters, except that the bone of the lower part of his legs was hampered by any coating of flesh, looking like finest hammered iron. And only the blood of the desert could have fathered that head of his, with the mystery of the far horizon still reflected from his great brave eyes.

For an instant he stood in this fashion —at attention, so to speak—then he flung himself into the air, his ears flattened, his head stretched forth, his back arched. In the very midst of his leap

he seemed to recall that this was not a matter to be fought out. He landed as lightly as a feather, in full galloping stride and swung away through the pasture. And there sat Christopher Ballantine leaning over his neck, guiding him, indeed, with merely the light pressure of his hand, and with the wind of the galloping blowing the mane straight back into his face. Like a thrown spear from a giant's hand, a flung javelin of polished ebony, Overland sped to the farther end of the pasture. There he swerved and came racing back. He heard the voice of his rider; he pricked his ears, lifted his head. He seemed to be considering the words with a man's intelligence. And so he slowed to a stop where he had begun, and Ballantine slipped to the ground.

CHAPTER IV.

OVERLAND.

"TEN thousand devils!" cried Mr. Holbrook. "That horse has been enchanted! I'll swear it!"

"Dear dad, you've sworn already!"

He brushed her objection aside. Without his oaths he felt like a naked man, or a dumb one.

"The old rascal has had his wits stolen from him, and you've done it, Ballantine. I have five hundred dollars for you, son, if you will do that with a saddle on him, too."

"Five hundred? For me?" said Ballantine.

The blood flooded into his face.

"I hope," said he, "that you're jokin', Mr. Holbrook."

"Is five hundred dollars a joke?" blurted out the rancher. "Since when, Chris?"

"Hush, dad, hush!" cried Peggy Holbrook, even stamping her foot in impatience that her father should not have perceived the root of Ballantine's embarrassment. "One can't pay a friend, I suppose?"

"A friend? Oh, I see what you're after. But, I tell you, I've had that offer standing for a year. Five hundred to any man who could ride him."

"It's worth five million in pleasure!" said Ballantine. "It is, sir!"

The rancher, studying the flushed, joyous face of the younger man, smiled and nodded.

"I believe you," he said. And he added slowly: "Ballantine, you love that brute, eh?"

"Like a man. More than a man!"

"I'll tell you what. For half of what I paid for him when he was a colt, I'll sell him to you. I paid two thousand for that horse, Ballantine. He's yours for a thousand!"

The eyes of Ballantine shone with a savage hunger. Then he shook his head.

"I can't afford it," he said.

A little embarrassed silence followed on this.

"Chris," broke out the girl, "how can you be so self-contained? Isn't there *any* impulse in you? Oh, if I wanted a horse as you want that one, I'd mortgage my soul for it!"

She was so pretty as she spoke, with her head in the air, and her hands clenched, that Ballantine looked on her with a dumb worship.

"Suppose that your soul wasn't your own?" he asked her.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Nobody would, I guess," sighed Ballantine.

The rancher turned away. "Think it over, my friend," said he. "A one-man horse like that ought to belong to the man who can ride him." And he went off whistling.

Christ turned to the girl and found that she was resting her elbows on the top of the fence, her abstracted gaze following the horse.

"I've never seen dad talk like that before," she said.

"Like what?" he answered, quite at sea.

"He's not open-handed. Not a bit! But after all, it *is* impressive—what you've done with Overland. Chris, how did you manage to do it?"

"I don't know. Just bit by bit. Taking him gradual."

"But you had to get in the corral with him, to begin with."

"Yes."

"Weren't you afraid?"

He could see that she was conducting a little cross-examination of him for the sake of some hidden purpose. And her voice was so gentle, and all her air so intimate, so quietly kind, that a great vague hope rose up in Ballantine. It made him quiver through all those massive muscles which clad his body with power.

"I was afraid—sure!" he admitted.

"But you fought the fear down, Chris? Was it hard to do?"

"Mighty hard. It was like walking in to a tiger, at first."

"When did you do it?"

"There was a bright moonshine one night. I came over after supper and went into the corral."

"What did he do?"

"He rushed at me."

"And you jumped through the bars?"

"No, I stood quiet and waited for him."

"Chris!"

"I was too scared to move—I guess!"

"Oh!" she murmured, and there was just a shade of disappointment in her voice. "But it was a brave thing to do," she added, "just the same. You love him, Chris?"

"There's only one thing in the world that I love more."

"Oh, of course. Your brother and sister. But that's different."

"Not them," he said huskily.

She looked sharply over her shoulder at him.

"What else, then?"

"Peggy——" he began.

She whirled around on him. "Heavens, Chris, what's the matter?"

But he knew that she guessed what was to come; knew that he would have no success, and yet he could not help going on with it.

"It's you, Peggy."

A shade rippled over her face; then she broke into laughter. "Chris, Chris, what are you saying?"

"That I love you, Peggy. And you don't care a snap for me. I can see that. But I had to bust out with it and tell you."

He had turned limp with despair. But, all the while, her face was a study composed of mirth and sympathy and surprise.

"I don't mean to be harsh, Chris. But how could I ever have guessed it?"

"I dunno," said he slowly. "I guess you couldn't. Except that I been coming over here pretty near every week, for the last year."

"Were you coming to see me?"

"Yes."

"I thought it was dad—and the horses. Oh, Chris, I'm terribly complimented that you could care for me, but don't you see—somehow—it just couldn't be! I'm mighty sorry!"

"Will you do one thing for me?"

"Anything, almost, except that."

"Then forget what I've said to-day!"

"I shall, Chris. Do you have to go?"

"I'll be going along. So long, Peggy."

His last glimpse of her showed him a face still struggling with the same mirth, the same compassion, the same astonishment and scorn. And it seemed to Ballantine that he hardly had the strength to climb into the saddle on his horse. For in the past few minutes a mirror had been held up before him, and in that glass he beheld the image of himself which the rest of the world saw. To them he was a great hulking fool, a coward, a flabby piece of ineffectiveness. He could have endured everything he had seen in the girl's eyes ex-

cept her scorn. But that stabbed him to the heart.

He was so tortured that he cried aloud: "Maybe they're right! Maybe I ain't no more'n worth that!"

The ears of his horse pricked at the sound of his voice. There was no other answer. Indeed, there was only a single rock of strength which supported him, and this was the sense that one creature understood him and loved him. That was Overland. The horse, at least, had found in him more to trust and to honor than in any other man. He took that strange comfort to his heart and went on, sick to the soul.

And he was bitterly shamed, also, that he should have exposed the state of his heart to the girl and been so casually rejected—and yet with such an effort at kindness! He could have wished for destruction at once! Anything to swallow him up in oblivion.

For this was the second terrible blow in the course of a few short hours. He had found that the brother and sister who were the very cause of his existence, cared no more for him than to use him. Now the woman he loved was snatched from him to the illimitable distance of contempt!

And he wondered to himself what there was that made him continue this wretched existence. It was for one purpose only—to strive to get this last thing that his brother and his sister wanted. It might complete his miserable labors. It would leave him—what? At least, having completed his work, he would be ready to die!

And he was only twenty-eight. But he had never been young. He had passed from childhood to old age at a step. Fifteen years of careless boyhood and young manhood had been tossed away and exchanged for the bitter duties of mature life. The pity of it was that he did not know the value of the thing which he had lost.

He let his mustang plod on to town. He had intended to go at once to Patrick Reddick and talk to him about the additional loan. But he felt that he did not have energy enough in his heart to speak now. He tethered his horse near the watering trough in front of the hotel and sat down on the veranda to rest, and while he rested, he dared not give his thoughts rein. He had to keep them in check with a bitter vigilance, for fear lest they should run away with him.

There were a dozen other men on the veranda of the hotel. Their faces were all a blank to him. He did not heed their voices, except for the heavy, rolling tones of big Jeff Partridge at the farther end of the porch. Partridge was the strong man from the North. He was reported to have lifted thirteen hundred pounds of dead weight and put it on a scale in the blacksmith shop. But the rest were nothing to Ballantine until the door of the hotel slammed and some one, lurching out, stumbled against his chair. He looked hastily up into the handsome, flushed face of young Harry Reddick, the banker's son. Obviously Harry had been drinking again, and even a little more than usual. Where he found the moonshine it was hard to tell, and it always drove him half mad. He was more than half mad on this day. It needed no more than the merest touch to quite unbalance his temper, and this touch was supplied, it seemed, by his lurch against the chair. He flew into a passion at once. The veins in his forehead seemed to stand out horribly.

"Hey!" he cried. "Did you try to trip me, you hound?"

The other voices on the veranda were struck into instant silence. Two or three in the distance rose, to watch the scene the more easily. And Ballantine felt the touch of expectancy. There must be a fight. No man could endure such language in silence and afterward hold up his head in the West. But he, Ballantine, *must* endure. For this was the

banker's son, and in five minutes he would be talking to that man!

"I didn't bother you, Reddick," he said quietly.

"You lie!" shouted Reddick.

A great wave of something rose in Ballantine. He could not say what it was, but it took him by the throat and made him shiver and shake, and cleared his eyes and made his mind as keen as an edged tool. Yet he did not stir. He dared not stir, though there was an instinctive life twitching through all his muscles.

Yet he said to himself: "Reddick is a known gunman. Am I his next victim?"

"Get up!" shouted Reddick, snarling like a mad dog as he saw the other submitting. "Get up and let 'em look a liar in the face and see what you're like!"

Ballantine rose. He hesitated, but it was only for a fraction of a second. Then he turned and walked down the steps toward his horse. He could feel the flesh drawing on his face. He could feel a chill as though a cold wind were blowing over him. He knew that he was white as a sheet.

And, behind him, he heard something like a groan from many throats, a subdued and angry sound. For it is an ugly thing to see a human being so utterly shamed. That sick, dreary voice gave way to a chuckle here, and a loud laugh there. But he did not look up at them. He twitched the head of the roan around and rode off down the street for the office of Patrick Reddick.

CHAPTER V.

FREE!

PATRICK REDDICK was one of those men who, having raised themselves from nothing, cannot forget the oblivion out of which they have come. If there were richer men in the world than he, he felt that none had come up from such humble beginnings. Consequently he always made a point of his original poverty, which is usually a point with your true self-made man. His vanity rules him.

He insisted, also, in keeping the bank in its old quarters.

"Fine clothes don't make the man and stone columns don't make a bank," he was fond of saying.

So he kept the bank looking like the façade of a general merchandise store. Into the bank went Ballantine. He had to wait half an hour to see the president, but finally he was admitted. Mr. Reddick sat with his chair tilted back into the window, and puffed on a cigar.

"Sit down, Ballantine," he said. "What's wrong now?"

Ballantine sat down and told his story. It began with a recital of recent disappointments, including the price for which he had had to let that year's sale of cattle go. It continued through other things. And, finally, he made his proposal for a loan.

The banker waited till he was quite done. All the time his bright little eyes, half encased in fat, thick wrinkles, never left the face of his visitor.

"How long have you been running the ranch?" he asked at last.

"Ten years."

"What was that ranch worth when you got it?"

"I don't know, exactly."

"Well, Ballantine, I'll tell you what it's worth now—just exactly the total of the mortgages that are slathered all over it. Young man, I wouldn't give you another five hundred dollars—let alone another five thousand!"

"Why," began Ballantine, "the land and the cows——"

The other broke in. His conversational habits were not the most polished in the world. He made a rule of saying what he thought when he thought it.

"The land and the cows are all right," he said. "It's the owner that I object

to. It's you, Ballantine. I'll be frank with you. I'll tell you the truth and the whole truth right out. What I'm gunna say to you now ought to be worth a whole lot to you, I say! Take it the way it's gunna be handed out. No malice—but facts! Ballantine, you begun with a big thing on your hands. To-day, you've got nothing!"

"Bad luck——"

"Bad luck the devil! There ain't such a thing as bad luck. Ballantine, I tell you that when I was only the owner of that little place there, I was better off than you are to-day!"

He pointed, as he spoke, to a photograph which hung upon his wall and showed a little shack on the side of a mountain surrounded by worthless second-growth timber.

It was the boyhood home of the banker. Ballantine had heard the story of his rise from those surroundings at least a hundred times.

"I was better off," continued the banker, "because though I didn't have nothin' else, I had hope. And hope is a great thing—hope and determination and self-confidence and self-respect. I say that all of them are great things for a man to have!"

As he enumerated these qualities, he shoved a stubby forefinger at the face of Ballantine. Behind that finger so stiffly extended, Mr. Reddick squinted as though he were looking down the barrel of his revolver at an enemy. And Ballantine watched him, fascinated. The nail of that right forefinger had been split by a saw edge in a mill in one of Reddick's early business ventures. Now the whole end of the finger was twisted and gnarled, but it looked stronger than ever—a hardy and brawny finger. Such was the whole man, the whole soul of Patrick Reddick, thought Ballantine—twisted, deformed, but wonderfully effective, wonderfully strong.

"Them are the things that a man needs, Ballantine. For a young gent just starting out in life, each of them qualities is better'n a thousand dollars of capital put out to good interest. A sight better. What d'you think that I had when I started out? Nothing but them qualities. And that was what growed into this here bank!"

He gestured around him to the four ugly, barren walls of the room, as if each wall gave onto a vista of immense beauty, immense wealth. Then he turned to Ballantine, and his benignant smile of self-satisfaction turned to one of a sort of sad sternness.

"Ballantine," he said, "you ain't hopeful, you ain't got determination, you ain't got self-confidence, you ain't got self-respect!"

Years have a vast weight, in conversation. And Ballantine felt himself borne down by the authority of Mr. Reddick's position, and of his age. He could not differ from this man. But, turning his own eye inward, he found nothing but proofs that the other was right—hopelessly, horribly right! He could only sigh and bow his head.

"Look how you should of come in here!" exclaimed the banker. "You should of come in wearin' a smile, with your head in the air, and full of your schemes. What are your schemes, Ballantine?"

"Why, sir, hard work——"

"Hard nonsense!" exclaimed the banker. "If a young man under thirty—think of it—a boy under thirty—ain't got a dozen different plans for pulling the earth up to the moon or hoisting the moon back to the earth, he ain't worth his salt, hardly. Ballantine, I'm talkin' free and hard to you, for your own sake. You're too old. You ain't nacheral. You ain't normal. You ain't never been foolish—and that's why you're a great fool!"

He paused, smashing his fist down upon his desk as he made this point, and letting his voice ring so loud that Ballan-

tine could feel it shivering through the walls and reaching, beyond the office, the ears of sundry clerks seated upon sundry high stools. He could see their heads raised; he could see the grins of mute intelligence which they flashed to one another. And the soul of Ballantine shrank small and smaller in him.

Mr. Reddick had gathered force as he went on; now he had become a resistless avalanche.

"Lend money to you?" he exclaimed, coming to his point at last. "No, Ballantine, I wouldn't lend a copper on that ranch. Not till there's some one else running it. You got about a thousand dollars in this bank—and that's all you have. You got that much cash, but you ain't got a cent of credit. Go back and think about what I've told you, young man. You could go around the world, but you'd never find no more valuable advice. Go along and turn what I've said over in your head. Let it work and grow into something worth while. Good-by, Ballantine, and remember that they's only one thing in the world that folks look for in a man, young or old—strength! Strength! Strength!"

He beat out the words upon the wall of his office until a faint, thundering echo rolled throughout the old building.

Ballantine went out into the anteroom. There he stood for a moment with his head bowed, his hat twitching in his fingers.

"You've had a hard time, I suppose," said a girl's voice.

He looked into the face of Reddick's stenographer.

"He's grouchy this morning—he's like a bear," she said. "I'm sorry!"

"You're sorry?" said Ballantine. "Well, ma'am, I'm not. Because this is the right way to start the day!"

What amazed him most was to find that he meant what he said. All the words that the banker had spoken had sunk into his soul like the truth out of the gospel. They could not be avoided. He could not argue down such bald and imperatively certain facts. Everything that the older man had said had been said with authority. And Mr. Reddick stood like a prophet of wrath above the soul of Ballantine, foreseeing his destruction in the very near future.

So that Ballantine, suddenly, cast aside a weight from his mind, and that weight was responsibility.

"I'm bankrupt," he said. "I'm smashed!"

No, there was still a thousand dollars between him and ruin. He went to the cashier's window.

"What's in my account?" he asked.

Presently the answer came back: "A thousand and twenty-four dollars, Mr. Ballantine."

"That'll be just enough," said Ballantine.

He called for a blank check, scratched out the sum hastily, and signed his name. Perhaps it was the last time in his life that his signature would mean money. He passed that check back through the window. He would have this money in fifties. Twenty fifties came back to him, all new bills, compressed into a solid little sheaf that he could pinch between thumb and forefinger.

But what he was holding between thumb and forefinger was not paper money, but a mighty black stallion, with a coat like water under the stars, an eye of fire, a soul of pride. Overland was his! Overland was his!

He leaned for a moment against the wall and took the full glory of that thought home in him.

He had lost his brother and sister; he had lost the woman he loved; he had learned that he was a worthless ruin as a business man; he had been disgraced in the eyes of the entire world as a weakling and a coward; but now he was to take in exchange for all of these injuries—a horse!

It was enough, he told himself. Rather be mounted on the smoothly

winged speed of Overland, rather be served by the stanch heart of the stallion than to have the mockery and the half-scornful affection of men and women around him. Rather be free with Overland than a slave with human company!

And he *was* free, free as a cloud in the sky. For there was nothing on earth which could make a demand upon him. He was of no service to his brother or to his sister. Rather, he was a heavy encumbrance to them. He would go away, and let them have the ranch.

He looked up from his dream. There were half a dozen people writing checks or waiting for money; he found that the eyes of them all were fixed upon him in a startled fashion. He must have spoken aloud, and what had he said?

It made no difference. He was nothing to them; they were nothing to him!

CHAPTER VI.

A GRIM AUDIENCE.

HE went out to his horse, mounted the weary roan, and turned it up the street.

Suddenly he found himself looking at the town with new eyes. It had always seemed to him, in the past, like a great center of power, a mysterious dwelling place of strength. Now he beheld it as a little sunburned village, huddled at the foot of a mountain. A pleasant scene, but not an important one!

He let the roan go slowly. There was no cause for hurry. He had nothing left to do except to pay the money down for Overland, and there was no chance that Overland would be taken by another man, for the simple reason that no other man could ride the great stallion.

He came, again, to the hotel, and as he passed, he heard laughter—he heard a great bass voice booming something in his direction. That was Jeff Partridge. He checked the roan and looked across the street. Yes, there was Partridge with his head bent back on his great brown throat, laughing heartily. And all of those around him were laughing, also.

Once more that wave of emotion swelled in Ballantine as it had once before, on this day; but now he recognized it. The thing which made him tremble through all his bulk was anger; the thing which made his eyes clear, his brain cold, was anger. Yonder was Jeff Partridge, a big man and a strong one. But was not he, also, big? Was not he, also, strong? Moreover, he was free, and the sense of freedom like an intoxicating wine mounted to his head and swayed him with consuming joy. He dismounted, threw the reins, and stepped up on to the veranda. Here was Jeff Partridge just before him, lolling in his chair and insolently pointing with his finger. Ballantine leaned above him, and as he leaned, he felt his power tingling in his heart, in his hands.

"Partridge," he said, "are you laughin' at me?"

Wonder struck the laughter from the face of the other.

"Laughin' at you? Why, the devil, man; why shouldn't I laugh at you?"

"Here's a good reason to stop laughin'," said Ballantine, and he struck Partridge across the cheek—lightly—a mere flick of the fingers, but it made a deep white imprint—a white print that turned instantly to crimson.

His first astonishment still kept Partridge motionless, but only for an instant. Then he leaped to his feet and struck as he leaped.

There was no confusion in the eye or in the mind of Ballantine. With the very first movement of Partridge, he knew that he was the master. For how absurdly clumsy, how absurdly slow were the motions of the huge cowpuncher and miner! He could have struck twice while the other was swinging once!

He put aside that roundabout blow with a raised hand. Then he struck home, to the point of the jaw, and saw the face of Partridge sag into a stupid lifelessness—saw him drop heavily to the floor of the veranda. He turned on the others.

"There might be somebody else," said Ballantine quietly. "There might be somebody else that feels like laughin' and wants to know reasons why he shouldn't. Let him step up. Let me hear him!"

He looked up and down the line. There was not a man who moved. Ballantine walked slowly before them. He let his eyes rest insolently, freely, on each face in turn. What was the strength and the mystery of these men? Once looked into, they proved themselves hollow, empty cups. But when he had been a slave to necessity, they had all seemed mighty men!

"I've heard tell," said Ballantine, "of gents that was so dog-gone strong-handed and so easy-goin', that they wouldn't take nothin' from nobody. But I see that you ain't that kind. You're a bunch of rats! A bunch of yaller-hearted rats. You sit back and snicker and giggle like fools when you think that there ain't no danger. But when danger comes around the corner, you sit fast, you sit tight! Lemme hear you peep! Lemme hear you talk some! Lemme listen to your ideas! You was laughin' large and loud a minute ago! What's come of all the laughin', partners? Fist or knife or gun, I'm ready and waitin' to hear you!"

There was not a sound from them.

"Now tell me where Harry Reddick is hangin' out," said Ballantine. "I'm a free man, now, and he'll hear something that I have to say to him. Where's Harry Reddick?"

Still there was not an answer. Immediately before him sat Lester Jackson, a wide-built man with the strength of an ox. He stooped and took Lester Jackson by the neck and heaved him to his feet. And Jackson was limp and light in his grip.

"Where's Reddick?" he snarled out.

"He's gone—inside!" gasped out Lester Jackson.

He tossed the informant to one side; and Jackson staggered against the wall of the hotel. How strange it was. They were all turned into mere shadows of men—mere paper images. They crumbled at his touch!

He entered the hotel. The proprietor, having sensed some strange occurrences outside on the veranda, was hurrying out from behind his desk.

"Where's Harry Reddick?" asked Ballantine.

"Ah, Ballantine. You'd better not see him. He's just sobered up, and he's as ugly as a devil—particularly after——"

"Where's Reddick, you fool!" snapped out Ballantine. "I don't want your advice!"

Now there was no more inoffensive man in the world than the good proprietor of the hotel. And he stared at Ballantine as at a man suddenly gone mad. He hesitated only a second, however.

"Reddick is over yonder," he said, and pointed.

In a stride Ballantine was at the door of the room. He saw Reddick sitting by the window; and Reddick leaped to his feet as he glimpsed the other from the side. Instantly the hand of Reddick went for his gun.

But he changed his mind. A devilish expression appeared in the face of Ballantine. It could not be that any man had changed heart in so few moments!

"Well, Ballantine," he said, "what'll you have to-day? Are you back here for a little explanation?"

"The boys are waitin' out on the veranda," said Ballantine. "They are waitin' to see you get down on your knees. They're waitin' to hear you ask my pardon."

"You're turned mad, Ballantine!" cried the other. "Why, you fool, I'd break you in two!"

He glanced over the arched breast and the thick-muscled body of Ballantine and changed his mind.

"Or blow your head off!" he said.

"Ah," said Ballantine, smiling and speaking with a voice which trembled with the joy of vengeance, "I was hopin' that it would be the guns. Are you ready, Reddick? Then make your draw!"

A shadow crossed the eyes of Reddick, a faint shadow of doubt, even though he had conquered so many times in hand-to-hand battles. And Ballantine, seeing that shadow, knew that he had won already.

He stepped slowly forward. "If you pull that gun I'll kill you, Reddick. Better trust to your hands——"

Twice Reddick wavered; then he determined on the gun, and jerked it out. It was much too late. For Ballantine was near enough to close with a single leap. With his left hand he caught the right wrist of the other. And he felt the hard tendons turn to mush beneath his fingers. He heard the dropped gun clang on the floor as the power of his grip turned that deadly hand of Reddick to a numbed, useless thing.

All this he did with his left hand, in a single grip. Then he smote up with his right, sharp and short, and tapped Reddick under the jaw. It snapped his head back on his broad shoulders. He turned limp, and slid out of the arms of Ballantine to the floor and lay there on his face.

Oh, to say that compassion and that shame for so easy a victory touched the heart of Ballantine then! But it would not be true. He felt in himself, as he looked down at that helpless body, a root of the most devilish impulses, only. Then he leaned, took the senseless body by the long, blond hair, and dragged Harry Reddick out to the veranda.

Before he reached that porch the pain had brought back the sleeping senses of Reddick. He was kicking and groaning and struggling half blindly by the time they arrived. The ten or a dozen who had been there before had been trebled in the interim. The news was abroad that there was trouble and fighting at the hotel, and that was enough to bring the crowd. For humanity has for calamity an extra sense, as buzzards have for new carrion, standing a hundred miles across the misty desert air to find the dead. So the people of the town had gathered in a brief, hurrying rush to find out what was happening at the hotel. These had arrived; others were coming. The blacksmith stood in his leathern apron three or four doors away, holding his sledge still in one hairy arm and shading his eyes against the sun as he stared to the hotel veranda. Every one was out.

And Ballantine, surveying all of these, was content. He wished to have every stroke of his work noted; and this was an audience after his own heart.

He flung his prisoner down on the porch. Reddick sprang up and lurched in with a moan of shame and of rage. But the right fist of Ballantine was turned to a ragged lump of steel. It smote Reddick down again and bespread his face with crimson.

"Reddick," said the conqueror, "some of the boys heard you talkin' big and broad about me a while back. I didn't have time to tend to you then. But I got the time now to stand by and let the boys hear you tell me that you're sorry that a skunk like you should talk to a man!"

"I'll see you——" began Reddick, groaning with rage and shame.

His voice was cut short, for Ballantine caught his arm and twisted it until the other yelled with agony.

"Help!" he shouted. "He's broken my arm."

"They stand still," said Ballantine grimly. "They're a lot of coyotes after your own pattern, Reddick. They'll stand still and watch a wolf eat you, and then they'll come sneakin' in and mumble your bones. Reddick, lemme hear you say it, or I'll tear you to bits!"

The agony made the eyes of Reddick start from his head, but he shouted suddenly: "I'm sorry that a skunk like me should have talked about you, Ballantine."

That was all. Ballantine tossed the other from him and turned his back and strode away to get his horse.

CHAPTER VII.

A WORD FROM THE SHERIFF.

BUT those who looked on—and well they understood it—had seen not the physical beating of a man but the crushing of his very soul, and the horror of it turned them sick. If the sheriff himself had started out on the scene, and shouted for their help, they could not have raised a hand to stop big Ballantine. He walked slowly among them, and his back was turned in deep contempt upon the fallen man, as if he knew that the very heart of his victim had been so crushed that Reddick would not dare to try to shoot even at his turned back!

And the crowd saw Reddick stagger to his feet, saw him fumble among his clothes, saw him find and draw a gun! He stood with it poised in his left hand for a moment, a thousand emotions of fury and of shame fighting in his face. Then he burst into tears like a whipped child, dropped the weapon, and fled to hide his face from them!

Yes, fled like a beaten boy, not like a man, and a giant among men! He fled, and, seated in the saddle on the roan, Ballantine watched him go—and smiled!

He turned the roan up the street. He rode slowly. He rode whistling as he went. He was free! He was free! Nothing under heaven had any claim upon him! Only Overland had a call for him, heart to heart, fierce power to power!

He rolled a cigarette. He lighted it and snapped the burning match into a cactus. What matter if it caught fire? Still he went on, his head high. He was not turning over in his brain the events through which he had just passed. They were in the past and almost forgotten, but what filled his attention now was that world which lay around him.

All the plain, all the hills, and yonder his namesake, Mount Christopher, climbing high into the blue of the sky—and all shining in the sun which blazed from the bald, polished faces of cliffs—how beautiful were all of these, how strong, how new, as though created in another form this moment and striking his eye for the first time. The fact that there was a little ranch somewhere in this wilderness of big things was of no importance. The fact that he was a part owner of it was nothing to take into his mind. All that he had been was dead!

Hoofbeats sounded behind him. Out of a cloud of dust, Sheriff Joe Durfee drew rein beside him.

"Pull up, Ballantine," he commanded. "I got something to say to you."

But Ballantine did not halt the roan. He let it wander slowly on while he studied the sheriff. Always before, Durfee had seemed to him the very incarnation of the spirit of combat, dry, lean, keen. Now he was less than a common man. He was nothing! A gesture could crush that frail body.

"I'm on my way and I'm busy, Durfee," he said. "If you want to talk to me, ride along with me!"

He half expected a storm, but the sheriff merely colored a little and then nodded.

"I see how it is," he said, as much to himself as to his companion. "This here job you've done of Partridge and on Harry Reddick, has got to your head, like red eye. Is that it?"

"I dunno," said Ballantine. "I'm not botherin' with thinking. I don't have to!"

"Son," said the older man, "I maybe see more of what's inside of you than you think. A pile more! You've held in for a mighty long time. Now you've busted loose. Partner, what I come after you to say, is this: I've figgered out what's wrong with you. I don't aim to have no trouble with you if I can help it. But, Ballantine, don't aim to think that you can ever come into town again and do what you done to-day and get away with it. The boys wouldn't stand for it twice. I couldn't stand for it twice. This day you picked on a couple that needed a fall, and you give it to 'em. To-morrow, you'd be turned into a bully. Mind you, Ballantine, I ain't threatening. I'm telling you to watch what you do from this time on!"

"Sheriff," said Ballantine, "what you want and what you think ain't of no importance to me. I'll tell you this: You and the rest have treated me like a mangy cur. Now I'm through sneakin' and crawlin'. From now on, I'm a man. And if there's ever any trouble that makes you come for me, come with both of your guns out and don't waste no time talkin'. Because words won't do no good!"

He turned his shoulder on the sheriff and sent the roan into a canter, and the sheriff did not follow. Where the trail turned sharply, a quarter of a mile ahead, Ballantine looked back from the corner of his eye and saw that the sheriff still sat in his saddle where Ballantine had left him.

And Ballantine smiled to himself. It was all very well. It was all exactly as he would have had it!

The big house of Mr. Holbrook loomed in the distance to the left, above the trees. He made for it at a round gallop, with the roan grunting as its tired forelegs pounded the trail. Then, under the shadow of the thin poplars, he dismounted, stripped the saddle from the back of the tired little mustang, and went to the house.

Peggy and Mr. Holbrook came together to the door; and he saw the start of surprise and the faint flush on her face as she saw him. He regarded her gravely, judicially, in turn. She, to his surprise, had not changed in his eyes as the others had changed. She seemed as delicate and as pretty as ever, as frank and as charming.

"Well, son?" said Holbrook. "Here you are back again! What's wrong now? Will you come in?"

Ballantine shrugged his shoulders. "She's told you, I guess," he said, watching the girl.

A guilty flush mounted her cheek.

"Told me what?" asked Holbrook.

"That I wanted to marry her?"

"Why, Ballantine," said Holbrook gently, "there's nothing to prevent a man wanting to marry any girl he sees."

"Well," said Ballantine, "she'll never have to trouble about that ag'in. I won't bother her. But what I've come back for is the hoss. I want the stallion, Mr. Holbrook."

"Ah? I wondered if that wouldn't tempt you, Ballantine! I wondered!"

He added: "That price I named is really a bit too much, considering the fact that no one can ride the brute, except yourself, and therefore——"

"I was never strong on bargaining," said Ballantine calmly.

He held forth the money. "Here's a thousand dollars. Do I get Overland?"

The other took the money with a somewhat reluctant hand. "A thousand dollars is a good deal," he said, "for a man who isn't particularly flush with money. And in fact, Ballantine——"

"Let it go at that! I'm satisfied. I'll take Overland."

"By all means. He ought to belong to you. By the way, Ballantine, have you had some good news?"

"Why d'you ask?"

"You seem changed—happier—bolder, I might say!"

"I've had the best news," said Ballantine, "that any man ever had!"

"Ah, that will be a legacy, I suppose?"

"Ay. Freedom!" said Ballantine. "It was given to me sort of unexpected. Like stumbling onto a gold mine in your back yard, you might say."

"Freedom?" echoed the rich rancher. "That's it!"

Holbrook rubbed his knuckles across his chin. "Well," said he, "you're talking around the corner from me. I hardly understand. But let that go. Are you coming out, Peggy, to see Overland go?"

"I'm coming," said she, in a very subdued voice.

Ballantine led the way to the corral, dropped saddle and bridle on the fence, and entered the enclosure of that pleasant little pasture where Overland ruled like a solitary king on a throne. It was nothing to saddle and bridle him. The big horse stood like a lamb throughout that ceremony. But when Ballantine swung into the saddle, and felt the great powerful body quivering under him, a new and hot temptation ran through his veins. It was easy to rule Overland by love; but how wild and fierce a pleasure it would be to rule him by sheer strength of will and hand!

CHAPTER VIII.

BY STRENGTH OF HAND.

THE rancher was all admiration. He kept nodding and smiling and calling to his daughter: "Look at that, Peggy! Remarkable, I call it, for a man to rule that horse as Ballantine does. Look at that! Obeys him like a high-school horse, I say!"

Peggy answered not a word. But her intent eyes were fastened upon the rider, not the horse, as Overland went back and forth happily, lightly, under his rider.

"There's something wrong, dad," she said in a low voice, not meant for the ear of Ballantine. And, indeed, it would never have reached the hearing of that other. Ballantine who had first spoken to her and told her of his love for her that morning. But this new creature was all of nerves and impulse, a very thing of fire. And he heard—heard while he reined Overland back and forth. "There's something wrong, dad!"

"Wrong with what, Peggy?"

"Hush!"

"Wrong with what? With Overland-I never saw him better, and he's transformed—transformed with kindness, Peggy. Ah, there's the greatest power in the world if we were all not too proud to use it. Too proud! We'd rather break hearts!"

"I don't mean Overland, but Chris. He's different."

"Different nonsense!"

"Something has happened to him. Look at his face and his eyes."

"Rot! And yet there is something changed in him. A bit terser—a bit abrupt, I'd say. Like a man in pain."

"Or in pleasure!"

"What d'you mean by that, Peggy?"

"Dad—oh!"

This last was caused by a sudden change in the manner of Overland. For from a gentle trot he had come to a sharp halt and stood, now, with his head tossed high, one ear flattened along his neck, and one ear keenly pricked, the very picture of a horse asking a question, and as though he said to himself: "Is this possible?"

For Ballantine had drawn in hard on the curb. It was the jerk of the bit that had stopped Overland, but it was

not a thing of the flesh that made him stop so short. Rather, he was saying to himself: "This was all persuasion before. What is it now?"

If he had any doubts, they were removed at once. The soft voice of Ballantine had turned harsh and stern: "Move on!" he commanded. "Get some life into you, Overland!"

And he accompanied that word with a touch of the spur. That was enough. Reason fled from the brain of the stallion. For this was the very manner of those other men who came to tear at him with whips and with sharp steel and strive to break his heart and his spirit. He had beaten them all. He would beat this man, also. Bring fire to powder, and there is an explosion. Bring force to Overland, and there was sure to be an explosion also.

He shot up into the air, driven from four powerful springs. He landed again on four stiff posts of steel that jarred the rider to his teeth.

"Chris!" cried the girl. "What have you done to him?"

"Ballantine, what's wrong!"

This from the father. But Ballantine had no care for their exclamations. His hands were full. First he put on the jaw of the stallion a pressure such as that outlaw had never felt before, a pull that might have broken the bones of another horse. And even Overland had to struggle to thrust forth his head. His sides, meantime, were crushed by the gripping thighs and knees of Ballantine. And, at the same time, his flanks were raked with the spurs.

"Not the spurs, Chris! You'll drive him mad! He'll kill you!"

"This hoss? I'd eat three like him for breakfast," snarled out Ballantine.

And then speech was impossible. He was caught into the heart of a hurricane. For Overland broke forth at once with all the tricks which he had ever used in all his struggles with a hundred expert riders. He broke forth with fury, but not with cunning. He was too startled for that. There was fear in his heart, a great, cold fear, for the transformation of the man upon his back was a thing bewildering—not to be understood. This was he whose voice had ever been softer than running water, whose touch had been nothing but a caress. Now he was transfigured to a wild cat whose raking claws were in the flanks of Overland.

So he fought in a reckless ecstacy, blindly, wildly, without brains. He hurled himself into the air and smote the earth on stiffened legs. Then up again, down again. He tried to tie himself into a knot in the mid-air, and landing with a thump, he cast all of his weight upon one hardened foreleg. Even that whip-snap shock, though it made the rider reel, did not dislodge him, and still the raucous voice into which the gentle speech of Ballantine had been translated, cursed and raved and mocked at him, and the spurs bit deeper.

The girl fell into an ecstacy of terror. She ran to her father and caught him.

"Dad, dad, for heaven's sake, stop it!"

"Keep still, Peggy," he answered, pushing her away. "Don't bother me. You'll never see such riding as that if you live to be a hundred. What devil is cased inside of Ballantine to-day?"

Overland had burst into a wilder frenzy of bucking than ever. His hoofs beat through the dust and tore up solid chunks of the ground and tossed them high above his head. Twice the rider swayed out of his saddle. Twice he saved himself by nothing short of a miracle and was back in his place. He was a weakened Ballantine, now, his head reeling on his shoulders, and his eyes turning wildly in his head. But still the incarnate fiend in him lived and stirred and made him yell a challenge at maddened Overland.

Two cow-punchers, passing toward the bunk house, saw, and with their shouting drew the cook from the house

as well as the rest of the house servants. Other men came up. There was a well-ringed group of spectators, now, to watch that historic battle in which Overland fought for his self-respect, and Ballantine fought to make him a slave.

And, when it ended, it was a white-faced rider who sat in the saddle, with two thin streams of blood trickling down from his nostrils, and his eyes staring huge from his head. He shouted hoarsely. Overland broke into a stumbling trot, head down. He jerked on the reins, and the big stallion came to a halt on reeling legs. He was beaten, exhausted, helpless. A child could have ridden him then.

There was not a murmur of applause from those onlookers, much as they worshiped good horsemanship, every one of them. It reminded Ballantine of the silence which had greeted the flooring of big Jeff Partridge and the humiliation of Harry Reddick. He looked calmly about him, wiping the blood from his face with his handkerchief. All those men were staring intently, not at the horse which had just been beaten, but at him, not with admiration, either, but with a sort of frightened awe. And yonder was Peggy, still shrinking at the side of her father. Even that wise man, Holbrook himself, was frowning in a bewildered fashion.

"Why did you do it, Ballantine?" he asked in wonder. "He was like a lamb for you. Maybe you've broken his heart, now!"

Ballantine scowled down at him. "D'you want me to treat a hoss like an equal?" he asked. "I'll have a hoss that walks when I say walk! And trots when I say trot. I'll have a hoss that lets me do his thinkin' for him. That's gunna be my way with hosses—maybe that's gunna be my way with men! If a gent can't get on with peace, lemme see how he can get on with war! One of you over there, open that gate!"

No one stirred.

"You with the red hair and the fool look," snarled out Ballantine. "Open that gate, will you?"

There was not an instant of hesitation. The man jumped as though a leveled revolver covered him. He opened the gate, and through it rode Ballantine. Then there appeared before him Peggy Holbrook, her face flushed, her eyes shining with indignation. She held out to him that sheaf of bills which he had recently handed to her father.

"We won't sell him!" she exclaimed. "We won't sell him. Dad thought he was going to a man who loved him—not to a—a tyrant—like you, Chris Ballantine!"

She stamped her foot. "Get out of that saddle and let Overland go back!"

He grinned broadly down at her. For his stunned brain had recuperated already, and the ache was gone from the back of his head, and once more he could see clearly, see and think. And what he knew was the delirious truth that he had fought and won again. Oh, power of mighty hand and arm, how he could have looked up and thanked God for those gifts. But power of mind and soul, also, how far greater! To be able to crush a strong man with a word, with a look. So, feeling all his strength upon him, he looked down to the girl and smiled.

"You got a lot of men here," he said. "Lemme see 'em do the thing that you want done. Lemme see 'em take me out of this here saddle, honey!"

"Chris Ballantine!"

"Women can talk," said the rider slowly. "And that's the end of 'em. Lemme see the gents act. Which one of you starts? Which one of you begins the party?"

He swept their faces with a calm delight. But not a man stirred. That hungry eye ate the power out of their souls.

"Dad!" cried the girl.

"Ballantine," said the rancher, "I call back that bargain. It was half a gift, and you know it. Get off that horse."

But Ballantine turned and laughed in the face of Holbrook.

"Holbrook," he said, "I ain't a fool. This hoss belongs to me. If I want to wring the soul out of him, I'll wring it, the way folks tried to wring the soul out of me. Get out of my way, I'm gone."

He started the horse off; then checked it again with a brutal violence that brought Overland sharply back on his haunches. The girl cried out as though the curb had torn her own tender flesh. He leaned above her.

"I've told you this mornin'," he said, "that I love you, Peggy. When I want you, I'll come back for you. Will you be ready to go?"

"I?" she cried. "Chris Ballantine, I'd rather be dead than touch your hand."

The wildness of her rage was a delight to him. He grinned again, drinking in the full sense of it.

"D'you hate me, Peggy?"

"With all my heart!"

"Good," said he. "Then I'll be back for you, Peggy. By day or by night. You'll hear my whistle and maybe you'll come out to me."

And, laughing loudly, he roweled the flank of the stallion and the black, already somewhat recovered from that duel for freedom or slavery, swung off into a reaching gallop.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROW.

HE did not reach home until dusk; and he made it purposely late. In the first place, he wanted to be alone, for a time with Overland. In the second place, he wanted to reach the house late for supper as he had done on the preceding evening. And there was a double purpose in both desires. When he left the house of Holbrook, he went out among the hills until he reached a little sun-covered dell of half an acre, with trees edging it, and with a little brook trickling along a side of it. There he gave Overland water, and after hobbling him, let the stallion graze and walked at his side, and soothed him with hand and voice. But Overland merely shrank from his touch and quivered at his voice and followed with great fear-haunted eyes.

That work which he had done on the horse that afternoon had been a victory, indeed, but it had been a defeat also. He realized that as he walked beside the horse. And he considered the details of that day gravely. He had lost, indeed, all that he had thought was dear to him. He had lost the girl, he had lost the affection of the great black stallion, he had lost, not least of all, the esteem of wise, kindly John Holbrook.

To balance against those losses, he had found—himself! And that, perhaps, was a treasure great enough to make up for all the rest.

For, he said to himself, by the wise spending of himself he could win back all that he had lost and more, also.

There was the horse to work on, first of all. And for that work he had the patience of stone. How slow was every step! The afternoon wore late before the stallion would so much as graze in his presence. And it was already sunset before the sound of his voice made Overland prick his ears.

Then he mounted. The great black crouched beneath him, ears flattened, trembling with anger and fear, but neither spur bit nor whip fell. There were two sorts of power. One was the mind; one was the mighty hand. He had crushed Overland once with his hand. And that was enough. Now he waited for five minutes, for ten minutes, speaking gently, continually, until Overland stood straight again and arched his neck. And, after that, the big horse cantered smoothly away, still starting at

every motion of his rider's hand, but more than half reclaimed from fear.

He reached the house in the dusk, therefore, according to his plan. A fine rain had begun to descend, blanketing the earth with a thicker twilight. He put Overland in a stall in the barn, fed and groomed him carefully, and came out to find that it was complete night. So much the better!

Old Alice, the cook, greeted him with a grunt as he entered the kitchen door.

"Late again, Mr. Ballantine!"

"My business keeps me late," he said sternly.

"Mine keeps me late, too!" she answered in heat. "And early. They ain't no supper here except for them that come on time!"

"You'll find another place to work, then, Alice," said he. "While you stay here, you'll do what you're told. You understand me?"

The voice of his sister called from the dining room:

"Christopher, what are you thinking of?"

She came hastily to the door, fired with indignation. "Alice, don't pay any attention to what he says. He's only one voice in this house!"

"My voice," said Christopher Ballantine, "ain't long for this house, my girl!"

"Not long——" she gasped out, suddenly taken aback. "Christopher, what do you mean?"

"Sounds like he's been drinking," drawled Will from the farther room.

"I hope to die," wailed old Alice, "if I spend another day under this roof! After me slavin' and workin' my hands to the bone to——"

He raised a finger at her. And that was enough. It did not even need words, it seemed, since he had found his new self, for she quailed before him, and shrank into a corner.

"Lord love us!" gasped out Alice. "What's comin' to pass here, I ask you?"

"Heat my supper again," commanded Ballantine. "And I'll hear no more out of you."

He turned his back on her, but as he strode into the next room past the astonished Sylvia, he could hear old Alice scurrying to obey. He tossed his hat into a corner and dropped heavily into a chair.

"Good gad, Chris," said his brother, "Sylvia is still standing!"

"When she's tired," said the elder brother, "she'll sit down."

"It's whisky, Sylvia," said Will, with a nod to her. "I think we'd better leave him here!"

Ballantine stretched out his hand and closed it on the arm of the other. Through that wiry athlete's muscles he felt the tips of his fingers glide until they gritted against the bone. And there was a shout of pain from Will. He wrenched back. As well have pulled against the hawser of a ship. The very effort merely served to throw him off his feet, and he fell back into his chair with a crash.

"Young fellow," said Ballantine, "you'll stay there till I'm through talking."

"Why," began Will, with plenty of courage, and unabashed. "I'll——"

"You'll do what you're told," said Ballantine. "Don't anger me, Will. Don't anger me. You've needed a thrashing bad ever since the day dad died. And, by the heavens, this evening it won't take much to make me give it to you—for the sake of your soul, Will—your self-satisfied soul! Sit fast!"

The red died away, somewhat, from the face of Will Ballantine. He stirred to rise, but the eye of his elder brother held him, and the numbness in the bruised muscles of his strong right arm held him, also.

This was most strange. He was accustomed to more than hold his own among men, even among athletes. But

here was a giant who had gripped him, and discretion rose strongly in the heart of Will Ballantine. He remained where he was.

"This," said Sylvia through her teeth, "is perfectly disgraceful. Will, if you are not man enough to assert yourself, I'll leave you with him. I certainly don't care to stay!"

The stiff forefinger of Ballantine was raised again.

"Sylvia," he said, "sit down if you like peace. Sit down and listen to me."

She stamped in a fury. "I suppose that I'll be manhandled if I don't? Christopher, have you gone mad?"

He could see that she was almost as astonished and as frightened as she was angered. And all of those emotions in her pleased him strangely.

"You'll stay," he said, "no matter for what reasons. But it's wise to stay, and I think that you know it. You'll stay, besides, because you're curious to know what I have to say. Now sit down yonder."

"I'll stay," she announced suddenly. "When one's own brother begins to talk insanely, it's time to be interested."

She slipped into the chair he had designated, and he answered her while he rolled a cigarette. Alice, furtive of eye and shaking of hand, brought in his plate and put it before him. He let it stay where it was and began to smoke.

"Not your brother, Sylvia," he said, "no way you figure it! Ony a sort of a useful tool that's been bangin' away at the ranch here, while you and Will took it easy at school. Now, Sylvia, and Will, I'm through!"

"Through?" breathed Will. "What do you mean, Chris?"

"What does that most usually mean? It means that I've stopped. The ranch belongs to you and Sylvia. Make the most of it that you can. It'll cut short your law practice, I reckon, and it'll keep Sylvia from playin' at society and at getting a rich husband. It'll make you buckle down and work like the devil, here, if you want to get on. But you'll do your work without me. Ain't that clear enough?"

Clear it seemed to be, and too clear. They could only gape at one another, as though each needed the help of the other to add up the full significance of this statement.

It was Will who weakened first. "Chris," he said faintly, "you've taken too much to heart that scene of last night. We all lost our tempers and talked foolishly. I mean, Sylvia and I did——"

"Don't sneak out," said Ballantine. "The gent you was talkin' to is dead. He was a coward and a hurt rat. He was sick of his life. He was ready to crouch every time any one raised a hand. Well, sir, I say that man is dead. And I'm inside of his skin, but I'm a stranger to him, and to you, thank heaven."

There was no answer to this, spoken as it was without passion, but with an acid edge of scorn more biting than anger.

"Do you really mean that you give up the ranch?" asked Sylvia softly.

"I give it up," answered Ballantine. "I've worked for ten years for the pair of you. What I've had out of it except trouble and slaving, Heaven only knows. I've tried to make a lady out of you—I've only made a vain, foolish, rattled-headed young ape. If you marry money, you'll marry the devil with it! I tried to make a gentleman out of your brother. I've only made a gent that can't think of nothin' but himself. I've fried every ounce of joy out of my life. And you've lived on the fat of the land, the pair of you. I've made you into a couple of foxes. All you've got is sharp wits, and no hearts in you. Well, wits is what is needed for the runnin' of this here ranch—more wits than I ever had—it's up to you.

"I end up my ten years of work with nothin' to show for it but a bit of sense

and a hoss. I've taken the last thousand dollars we have in the world and I've soaked it into the buyin' of a hoss. It's the one thing that I've wanted, outside of a girl that laughed in my face to-day when I asked her to marry me. But I took out the cash and I bought the hoss. In five minutes, when I'm through with this supper, I'm gunna go out and roll my blankets, and climb on the back of that hoss and ride away. And Heaven help me if either of you ever see my face ag'in. I figger that's sort of final. I've done my talk. You'll get nothin' more out of me. Good-by to you both!"

CHAPTER X.

CHRIS LEAVES RANCH LIFE BEHIND.

THE rest of that meal was never to be forgotten by Ballantine, nor the savage, sullen pleasure which it gave him as he sat there surrounded by the growing consternation of his family. There was too much pride in Will to allow him to speak. He even rose and left the room. Outside the house, Ballantine could hear him whistling loudly, expressive of unconcern. But that did not fool the elder brother. He knew that the face of the whistler was white with fear of the future. In the meantime, Sylvia was trying to draw him out.

"Of course, Christopher," she said, trying the tack of dignity, "neither Will nor I know anything about the affairs of the ranch."

He said not a word.

"And it would simply be destroying the entire value of the ranch, if it were turned over to us."

He stayed with his clew of silence and continued his supper, slowly, methodically, with a poignant sauce of self-satisfaction in every mouthful that he ate.

"Mr. Bannock," went on the girl, still eying him anxiously for a sign of a change, "tells us that there *is* a chance to get something out of the old place, but only by the most careful working."

He spread a large slice of bread with butter and eyed her vacantly. And he wondered at the steadiness of his nerves as he gazed. For her keen, penetrating glance had ever been a terror to him before this. Yet his glance slipped past hers easily as a rapier in the hand of a master glides around the guard of a tyro. And she shivered a little, and shrank from his power of will. And again that savage satisfaction filled the breast of Ballantine with a sort of cold glory—as it had been filled before on this day of days, when he had struck down Partridge and Harry Reddick, when he had scorned the sheriff to the latter's face, when he had bought the stallion, and when he had crushed the fighting horse, now finally, he was bringing the steel of his revenge into his household and every word, tapping on his resolution, gave back to him only a further proof of the excellent temper of his courage. Nothing could shake him. At a stroke, he had been removed beyond the reach of pity or of compassion.

Her own will power was a remarkable thing. She flinched, but she did not cease striving to persuade him, though he knew that it was misery to her haughtiness, so long pampered and fed by his own folly. Will Ballantine came back into the room and slumped into a chair, and attempted to eye his brother and sister with a matter-of-fact manner. But it was easy to tell that he was under a bitter strain.

"Besides," said the girl, "you must not think that we ever would have called all your work here a failure. Even Mr. Bannock, who seemed rather positive about a good many things, would not have gone that far. Not even he! Of course, Christopher, when we broke out at you the other evening—like a pair of spoiled children, Chris—we didn't mean what we said!"

How subtly she had made the change in tone, the change of language, leaving his formal name and picking up his nickname in the very same sentence! He could not help admiring her artistry at the same time that he saw through it and her methods.

And then, too, how clever it was of her to bring in that suggestion of their youth—and the fact that he had, indeed, been like a father to them, and that they had looked up to him, in a measure, as children to a parent. But in how small a measure he could not forget! This was all very well, this last-minute smoothness, but indeed, he had filled the parental rôle only in so far as it is the duty of a father to supply clothes and food and money—never once had he received authority or even respect! Still he said nothing, and kept his face a blank. Now and again old Alice came fluttering in to bring something to the table. She was in a terrible consternation. For the fear of losing her place was sliding into her soul like a knife. Not that she could not have found other work easily enough, for as a rough cook she was famous on the range, but she had worked so long for them that she was a part of the family.

He made it a point, now, to relent to her. He nodded and smiled when she brought him a cup of coffee. He thanked her and refused when she offered to supplement his supper with a dish of bacon and eggs. And then he turned from her and her relief to present a blank face to the others.

Still Sylvia bit her lip and went back to the attack, casting a single sidelong, fiery glance at her younger brother as though to whip him up to her assistance.

"Mr. Bannock," said she, "went so far as to declare that, in a way, you'd showed a great deal more intelligence than any one in the neighborhood."

It was too much for Ballantine. He looked at her with a faint smile of contempt for such foolish flattery.

"I mean," she said, and flushed hotly, "that he really said that, because you've cleared out the bottom land and made it ready for irrigation. He's one of those who believe that that old dam you built in the cañon will really work. And then, of course, hundreds of acres of the land will be worth thirty times as much as they are now. Of course, Chris, Will and I could wait until next spring, when the floods come and the ground is irrigated. And then we could sell the place and get a good deal of money out of it, after people have seen that the irrigation scheme is actually practicable. But what a shame to rob you of all the honor of your work, Chris, and take away any of the reward! Not that we *would* take any of the reward away. If we worked the place, we'd set aside your share scrupulously every year. You could depend upon that!"

He had finished his dinner. There was only the second cup of coffee, and while he held it in one hand, sipping it, he reached out and turned up the flame in the big oil lamp so that it cast a sudden glare in her face. By that increased illumination he studied her coldly, relentlessly, and she, with slightly widened eyes, endured his scrutiny. But she weakened under it.

"Oh, Chris!" she moaned suddenly, clasping her hands together and stretching them a little toward him, "don't you see that it will be the veriest hell for both of us if we're left out here—alone? We don't know a thing about the ranch. We—we both hate the ranch life. We can't help it. You've made us that way, Chris. You've kept us away at school and given us every comfort that we could wish for while you, poor dear, have been carrying on the struggle."

She glanced at Will.

"It's true," said Will a little huskily. "Every word you say is true, Sylvia. And, confound me if I don't feel more and more like a rat for the way that we've treated you!"

A touch of a new emotion came to Ballantine. It was well enough to withstand the artifices with which they were surrounding him. But he was not quite prepared to endure real emotion, and he could not doubt that there was real emotion in the voice of Will. He looked down, afraid to reveal the sudden softening which was in his heart.

"Besides," said Will, "I've been thinking a bit rapidly for me in the past five minutes. Mind you, Chris, I know that you'll think this is a fake all carefully arranged to lure you back to the ranch. But darn me if it is! I mean what I say when I say that I can see our comfort—I mean Sylvia's and mine—has been built on your slavery. I've actually taken it for granted that you are a sort of inferior person and that I had a right to live on your drudgery. I keep remembering what I said to you the other night. Well, Chris, I was despising you, then. And if it has to cost us the loss of you in order to understand what you really are, by the heavens I'm glad of it. If I've lost a brother, I've found a man. That's that!"

"Will!" cried his sister. "What in the world are you talking about?"

"Something you feel as I feel it—but you haven't looked at it in that light, yet. Don't sham, Sylvia. You can't fool Chris. He sees through your fake. And I'm glad, by heaven, that he *can* see through it. I wouldn't have him otherwise, no matter how many years of drudgery it costs us on the ranch."

"I'll not stay a month!" she snapped out.

"What'll you travel on?"

"I have friends——"

"You'll not take charity. No. Sylvia, you'll do just what I'll do! You'll roll up your sleeves and buckle down to work and try to make things run as well as we can. But you, Chris, why, confound it, old man, if you want freedom, go and have it. You've earned it. And when we can do it, we'll send you on supplies. You can have your fling now—as big a fling as we can afford to pay for!"

But Sylvia, all her strength collapsing as she saw herself deserted by her last ally and found that she was indeed to be condemned to the ranch life which she loathed, as she saw all of her dreams of silks and idleness snatched away, all her hopes of social prominence and an easy life gone into limbo, broke down utterly. She dropped her head on her rounded white arms and broke into tears.

Ballantine regarded her with a blank, unfeeling face, for a moment. Let her have her moment of sorrow. She had her youth before her in which to recover herself and find a new place in the world. But this thing had cost him ten years of agony, and ten years are more priceless than diamonds and gold.

He rose, at last, stepped to the corner, picked up his hat, dusted the crown of it carefully, settled it on his head, and looked around him. On the wall hung his Winchester. It was old and out of date. But it still shot strong and true, and the fifteen cartridges in its magazine were fifteen strong friends which would kill at the touch of his finger. The revolver ammunition was in the box on the corner table. For, after supper, weary, head bowed with the day's labor, he was accustomed to sit over the dining table and clean his guns and load them afresh. For there was rarely a day of riding on the range without a few chance shots at rattlers or jack rabbits, or even a coyote, now and then, when he rode up into the wind and suddenly topped some hollow. He went to that box, now, and began to load his revolvers, feeling their eyes upon him as he worked.

Sylvia had stopped crying, now. She and Will were both keeping hopeless, gloomy eyes upon him. And he rejoiced in their feeling of desertion. Let the steel enter their souls, as it had entered

his! Let them find themselves through anguish, as he had found himself, and then if they discovered in themselves such a well of exhaustless strength as he had found in his own soul, they would bless the day that he left them to work out their own salvation.

The guns were loaded, now, and one restored to the holster at his hip, one stowed under the pit of his arm, for an unseen weapon is sometimes more valuable by far than one which is open to view.

Then he stepped through the door, and there was a tug at the very strings of his heart as he left his brother and his sister behind him. At the outer door of the kitchen, when he had thrown it wide, he paused for a moment. There came a little rush of footsteps behind him—then the voice of Sylvia, broken and weak like her child's voice which he could remember out of the old years after their father's death, the child's voice which had made him swear to himself to do for her all that his father could have done had death spared him.

"Chris, don't leave us! Dear Chris, for pity's sake, don't leave us!"

A wave of warm weakness swept over him; a dimness covered his eyes with a mist. And in a trice he would have turned back to her. But at that moment, a wind blew out of the night and carried to him the scent of sage brush, stinging and clean, and sharp alkali, and mingled with this, the fragrance of the pines on the farther hills. And as he breathed deep of it, he saw the stars rimming those hills with dots of clear fire, and he heard, far off, the mellow thunder of a lobo baying at the newly risen moon.

He made one tentative pace through the door, still more than half resolved not to leave the house, but as he did so, it seemed to him that the night flung a shadowy arm around him and drew him closer to its bosom, and all his past life was dead behind him, dead among the strong smells of that dark little kitchen; and all his future life lay in the land of enchantment spread before him.

"Chris—one word——" he heard Sylvia pleading desperately.

He reached out to the door without turning around, and, catching it with his hand, he slammed it heavily in her face.

CHAPTER XI.

AMBUSHED.

HE heard her sobbing; then he heard the step and the voice of Will comforting her and leading her back into the dining room. Yes, there was metal in Will, and this was the life to bring it out more than close-schemed plans for his advance as a lawyer in New York. A few years of this would not hurt him, and he would be twice himself when he took up the work of his life, if law was to be that work!

He went on, leisurely, enjoying, it seemed to him, the sweetness of his freedom more and more with every step. And now, through the starlight before him, he saw the glimmering form of one of the horses in the paddock. Might he never return to see its lean ribs by daylight!

"Chris Ballantine?" a voice said softly behind him.

He turned. The voice seemed to come from a scrub cedar just behind him, but there was no shape which he could make out at first.

"Yes," he said, "this is Ballantine," and as he spoke he made out the form—a shadow, two shadows, mingling with the outline of the little tree. And the dull starlight gleamed faintly on two bits of metal.

He did not wait for what, something told him, was sure to follow—the roar and the flashing of two guns. But a stabbing thrill of joy rushed through his blood and through his brain. This was the new life—this was the proper crossing of the threshold of it!

He dropped flat to the ground as that thought came to him. And while he was still in the air, two guns spat fire from the dark of the cedar. His own Colt was out of the holster and extended along the ground. He had hardly touched the dirt, breaking his fall with his left hand, before he fired in return. He heard a scream. He saw a form detach itself from the gloom of the tree, twist around, and fall headlong.

Then he fired at the second man, fired while a third bullet was cutting the air above his own head so close that he thought he could feel the wind of it stir his hair, for his hat had fallen off. That second shot missed. But at least it had come close enough to its target to make the other dodge out of view behind the line of the cedar. What Ballantine next heard was the swiftly pounding feet of a man in full flight, and as the kitchen door of the house was thrown open, Ballantine, starting pursuit, saw the fellow dart across the dim shaft of light—a rather small, broad man, sprinting with wonderful speed.

He tried a snapshot as the other plunged into the darkness beyond. But the light from the kitchen lamp was streaming straight into the eyes of Ballantine and partly dazzled him. Before he could fire again, he saw the stranger fling himself onto a horse and instantly rush away down the road.

He himself turned for the barn, and turned at the run.

Will was calling, behind him: "Chris! Chris! Is that you? Is it you? Answer me, Chris!"

"I'm safe!" he shouted over his shoulder, and plunged into the dark of the barn.

There he tore the saddle from its peg and threw it on the back of the black stallion. In a trice he was out again, with the rush of Overland whipping a strong wind into his face. He went by Will like a flash.

"Chris!" cried the other.

He waved his hand and was gone.

He did not follow straight down the road. There was a shorter way from the barn over three low hills. And he took that rough going, trusting to the nimble feet of the stallion. And well did Overland prove, that night, the value of a long life in rough pasture lands, where the wit of a human rider is not used to guide a horse in the right way, but all is left to his own brains.

On a loose rein, his head high, he worked out his own course in the general direction which Ballantine selected. And his long, whipping stride put the ground in a steady rush behind him. They darted over the first hill and down into the hollow with a swoop that brought the heart of Ballantine against his teeth. He wanted to shout his joy, but his voice must not be heard. Even the beating hoofs of the great stallion might be enough to warn the killer that vengeance was coming behind him.

Over the second hill and over the third, and now, just beneath him, ran the long, white, straight road, dim under the stars, but growing brighter each moment as the moon climbed higher in the sky. He looked back up the trail. But no horseman was coming down it. Had the other, then, cleverly cut straight across country?

No, yonder he went, a dark streak diminishing in the mist of the moonshine. Surely he was well mounted, this slayer by night! Even Overland would be taxed to overtake such a flyer as yonder horse!"

Now they were on the road in turn, and he could see the outline of the stranger's form grow suddenly smaller. He had seen or heard the rush of Overland and now he was leaning along the neck of his horse to jockey it to the fullest speed. With the straightaway before them, this would be a test of the relative merits of the two mounts!

Ballantine tightened his rein. With a strong wrist and yet with a sensitive

touch, he took the feel of the head of Overland so that the stallion could lean well into his full stride. He leaned forward and eased his weight onto the withers of the black. In response, Overland gave forth such a burst of speed as Ballantine had dreamed of but never felt before. It seemed that the big animal had taken wings. There was a breathless swoop to every stride. And he seemed lengthening and flattening toward the ground as he settled to his work.

And still the stranger did not seem to come back to him! Amazement filled the heart of Ballantine! He had not dreamed that there was another horse West of the Mississippi which could hold this pace and not falter! There might be speedier horses by far to whirl around a leveled track with a featherweight jockey perched on its back, but where else than in Overland was there such a union of strength and speed, dauntless endurance, ability to gallop like the wind?

There might be explanations. Yonder was a stocky man, but a short one. A hundred and fifty pounds of manhood, say, whereas he, in exchange, burdened Overland with a solid bulk of two hundred pounds. That handicap was bound to tell fearfully.

Ay, but here was the stranger coming back to him indeed! There could be no doubt about it now. As the moon rose higher, as its light brightened, it cast behind the fugitive a long and fluttering shadow that bunched like a squatting toad as the horse descended on the road and stretched swiftly out again when he launched himself up and forward in his next swinging stride. And the black outline of the stranger drew steadily back to Ballantine—steadily but slowly!

There was still a great gap between the two horses. Might it not well be that, forcing Overland to a sustained sprint to bring him within anything like a sure revolver range of the fugitive, he would be totally exhausted, so that the stranger could sweep off away from him? When a running horse falters, he is done; and the rival may wing away with almost unimpaired speed, simply because it has not been run out so rashly.

So Ballantine drew up a little and took the stallion first out of his wild burst of full-speed running, then out of his secondary sprint into a long, sweeping gallop. His head was no longer strained straight before him. It was raised easily. He raced proudly over the ground, at ease, running well within himself. The stranger, too, as though realizing that by a sprint he could not draw away, had ceased urging his animal on except with an occasional swing of the quirt. And, at this rate, Overland held the other without trouble. Ay, and gained a little, but slowly, slowly!

Meantime, the miles were flowing fast behind them. They neared the town. The stranger turned north on the Bingham road. They passed up long grades into the hills, dipping constantly into long, easy hollows, and rising again over gentle swells. But the surety of victory was with Ballantine, now. Overland was hard pressed by that long run. There was no doubt of that by the way his lungs were working, but the horse of the fugitive was in far worse condition. His head was stretched straight forth, a sure proof that he was running again to the full of his strength. And even that effort could not shake off Ballantine. Every moment, now, the stranger was turning to look back. He began to open a scattering fire from his revolvers. But Ballantine heeded nothing of that. It was only by miracle that a shot could go home, fired in that dull light from the swaying back of a horse at full gallop.

He had only to wait until the gap between them was closed a little more, and then—the finish! He was gathering the life of another man into his hand

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—gathering it slowly, leisurely, enjoying the taste of the kill before the moment of it came. And sweet was that taste to Ballantine! The fierce joy of it made him tremble; and he grinned against the wind of Overland's gallop, and drew in his breath as if he were drinking wine.

It was not a blind flight, however, this of the assassin. For now, as they topped another hill, Ballantine saw before him a great sweep of second-growth timber where the Bingham Road dips into the upper and rougher hills. He had forgotten that stretch of timber. Once inside the skirts of it, the stranger could dart off to the side by any of a thousand openings, and if he were followed, could turn and shoot down his pursuer at leisure. Even now he was jockeying his horse down the slope with spur and whip!

So Ballantine called on Overland again, and this time how great was the difference. The rush of the black stallion was hardly less strong and swift than his first burst as he left the ranch. He strained his head forward like an eagle reaching after a fish hawk in mid-air. Far different was the answer of the horse which fled before them. He did his best, urged by all the bitterness of gouging spur and flogging quirt, but there was no more strength left. Presently his head went up and began to bob —a sure proof that he was done. That flight for the near-by woods was hopeless, now, and the stranger seemed to realize at once that his chances were gone.

He drew rein sharply. His mount was brought to a staggering halt, and then turned back to face the charge of Ballantine. And he came with a sweep, his revolver held stiffly before him, firing fast. He saw the gun flash up in the hand of the other. He saw it spit fire once. Then the stranger reeled from his saddle and lay, spread-eagled, on the dust of the road. Overland would have trod him under foot as he rushed on, but he gathered himself at the last moment and leaped clear.

Ballantine was turned and back again in an instant. As he came he could see the cause for the length of that pursuit. Standing with drooping head, its sides bright with running sweat, its ears flattened against its neck, the horse of the gunman was still as beautiful a picture of speed and high blood as Ballantine had ever seen in all his days. There was length of limb and bigness of bone and depth of lung as well. It seemed a wonder, now, that even Overland, handicapped with such a burden, could have caught him!

He stooped above the stranger and turned him on his back. He found himself looking down into a broad, ugly face, now loose-featured and limp. But the man was not dead. His heart still beat, though slowly. And from the edge of his forehead along the side of his head, Ballantine could see the place where the bullet had struck. It had glanced from the bone of the head and left a nasty-looking wound, but in reality one of no importance. Water and a bandage were all that were needed, and through the stillness of the night, above the noise of the panting horses, Ballantine could hear the trickling of spring water. He lifted his victim, therefore, and carried him toward that sound. He laid the gunman beside a little water-filled basin, and it was the pain of the cold water in the wound that roused him. He swayed to a sitting posture, groaning out a curse.

"Steady," said Ballantine. "You're out of trouble now, but you're only out for a minute. Mind your hands, partner. I've followed too far for you to start takin' chances now with you!"

"It comes back to me," said the other sullenly. "You're Ballantine."

"I'm Ballantine. Sit tight while I get this cloth around your head."

The crushing pressure of the cloth

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against the wound of the other must have caused the most excruciating pain, but he let not a single whisper of complaint escape from him. Only his breathing grew irregular and stertorous. When the bandaging was ended: "Where to now, mate?" he asked.

"To the sheriff," said Ballantine calmly. And the stranger nodded.

"Was Steve killed?" he asked suddenly.

"By the way he fell, I guess so. I didn't stop to look."

"It was a low trick!" snarled out the other.

"Ay," said Ballantine, "shooting a man in the back——"

"I mean bein' sent out and told that you was simply a strong-armer and no sense with a gun! It was low, lyin' to us that way!"

Ballantine regarded him with a keener interest. There was not the slightest pang of conscience about all of this, it appeared. The man was as much at ease as though he had been overtaken in some good action.

"Who sent you out?" he asked.

"The judge'll ask the same thing," said the other, and grinned shamelessly at his intended victim.

"Yes," said Ballantine, "but I'll pay for what I want to know."

"What sort of money, partner?"

"Freedom, maybe," said Ballantine.

"You mean you'll gimme the gate and turn me loose? Is that it?"

"That's it."

"It's a lie," said the gunman. "There ain't no chance of that. You wouldn't be such a fool. All you want me to do is to shoot off my face, and when I've told who it was, you'll take me on into town."

"Maybe there's a chance of that, too. But I figger it's a chance worth takin'! You won't be no worse off than you are now. Who sent you out? If you tell me, it's a one to fifty shot that I'll let you go free."

"The skunk don't deserve to be covered up," said the other. "It was young Reddick, the banker's son."

Harry Reddick! It sent an electric thrill of horror through the mind of Ballantine.

"What reason did he give for wantin' to knife me?"

"Said you was a crook that would shoot him in the back as quick as you'd wink."

Ballantine considered this quietly. He was beginning to see another phase of this new life into which he was stepping. It was not necessary to seek adventure. Aventure would come seeking him without an effort on his part. In a trice he made up his mind. There would be no wild wandering. He would simply ride into town and find what he could find.

"Turn out your pockets," he commanded.

"Ay," grunted the other. "I knew it'd turn out this way. I was a fool to blab!"

He turned out his pockets, and a small shower of things fell on the ground, all except that one for which Ballantine was most carefully waiting.

This fall of small possessions was accompanied by a little running comment from the gunman: "That watch runs slow five minutes a day. But you can depend on it just that way. It'll never run no more nor no less. There's a pocket knife that'll open tin cans or slice up greasers; you never seen steel like that. Nothin' at all can turn its edge."

"There's one thing more," broke in Ballantine, "and I suppose it's here."

He reached into the breast pocket of the smaller man and his fingers closed on the soft, padded warmth of a leather wallet. There was a groan from the gunman as his treasure was drawn out.

"It ain't all mine," he wailed. "I swear it ain't. It was give to me by a friend to take to his wife and his kids!

She's a widder now. He was dead before I left him."

"I guess he was," admitted Ballantine. "Lemme know how much of this come from Reddick."

"Two hundred even."

"As cheap as that?" murmured Ballantine. "Why, you can get a man killed as cheap as you can buy a good hoss! That's all, friend. Here's your gun back ag'in. It's loaded, still," he added. "You might be sort of careful of it!"

He did not make a move toward his own weapon, but the criminal, regarding him with a steady scowl of the blackest malice, seemed to decide that this was no fit opportunity for a gun play. He shoved the weapon reluctantly out of sight among his clothes.

"I want to know one thing," he said.

"What's that?"

"What sort of a hoss is that?"

"Take a look."

The gunman went to Overland and stood reverently before the tall stallion.

"He's got it," he said at last. "I figgered there wasn't a hoss this side of purgatory that could catch my gelding—not with no fifty-pound handicap. But this big black devil has got it. How much, partner, would you take for that hoss?"

"A bullet through the head," said he, "would buy him. And that's about all."

"You ain't a fool," stated the stranger, "though your turnin' of me loose has the looks of it. Well, son, he's worth that bullet and maybe a mite more! So long!"

He climbed into the saddle on his gelding which, having blown out during the interval, had fallen to cropping the sun-cured grass at the side of the road.

"By way of lettin' you know," he said, "my name is Hank Nevis."

"Hank, I'm glad to see you go."

"I'm comin' back ag'in, Ballantine. I never yet have got trimmed without takin' another whirl at the gent that done it."

"You have your life, you rat," said Ballantine in contempt. "Be off with you before I change my mind."

The answer of Hank Nevis was a veritable whine of rage; and then he was gone.

CHAPTER XII.

HANK NEVIS' ANSWER.

HE could not be sure that he had heard correctly that last snarl from the disgruntled gunman; but it seemed to him that what the departing horseman said was: "I'll send Pierre to talk to you!"

That, of course, must have been an illusion of the ear. There was only one man in the world so celebrated by that name, and he was the famous Canadian who had made for himself such a place in the eye of the West that even during his life he loomed as large as those famous old heroes of the early days on the frontier. Men told fables about him; and he was still young!

No, it could not have been Pierre that was meant, with the moccasined feet and the little fur cap, brown-faced Pierre on one of his wild-caught mustangs. That was a trick of the fancy which had made Hank Nevis seem to mention the famous name. And, dismissing that fancy with a little shudder, Ballantine turned the head of the stallion toward the town.

It was the early dawn when he arrived in it. The proprietor had not yet come downstairs in the hotel, but Ballantine banged with his fist upon the desk until he raised a storm of curses from the rooms above him, curses muffled by intervening partitions but still distinguishable. And the proprietor himself came down in a furious haste, swearing with every step he took.

But when he glimpsed the face of his guest, he stopped abruptly and his eyes widened. It was a veritable mask of fear that Ballantine saw, and the sight was pleasant to him. For, in his day, Gus Dickson had been a formidable

man with weapons, and he was so still, for that matter. Many and many a time his old-fashioned Colt had come into action in the liquor days in the hotel. He carried the scars of his battles with him. But even Gus Dickson seemed to see in Ballantine more danger than he cared to trouble with.

"It's sort of early, Ballantine," was all he mumbled. "What can I do for you?"

"A room," said the guest, and he was straightway shown to one. Ay, more than that, the proprietor remained to turn down the covers of the bed and bring in fresh towels and draw the shade so that the early morning light would not disturb the slumber of the sleeper. And the least of these was far more than he would have done for a man who was not a known fellow for prowess of hand.

As he was going out, he paused again in the doorway. His manner was still amiable, almost fawningly ingratiating.

"Will was in a while back. He brung in Steve Ranger's body with him and then left ag'in. I guess the sheriff will be wantin' to see you to-day, Ballantine!" And, grinning and nodding, he went out.

Steve Ranger, then, was the name of the fellow he had shot down. And for that shooting, the sheriff was ready to arrest him? However, he was too tired and too satisfied with himself after the greatest day of his life, the only real day of living, to pay any heed to such matters.

He was in bed in a trice. Only for an instant he fought back the wave of slumber that struck over him. He could hear the sounds of the day's life beginning in the street. The town was waking up. He listened to those sounds dreamily for a moment. Then sleep carried him an eternity away from the earth.

When he wakened, the air was hot and still. He raised his head from the pillow and knew by that heavy, drowsy murmur which pervaded the town, that it was high noon. There was a tapping at the door, the same sound which had awakened him. So he rose from the bed and hurried to answer the summons. But, halfway to the door, he paused. He was no longer the man of the day before. So much water had flowed under the bridge since that last awakening that he must be prepared to face a new life. And, among other things, he must not carelessly open doors to the first comer.

So he took the time needed to half dress himself and belt on his revolver, at the same time calling: "In a jig, partner. I'll be there. Who is it?"

There was a murmur in reply which he could not quite make out, and he went to the door, at last, with his hand ready at his gun. But when he opened it, he found the sheriff himself waiting outside, waiting carelessly, leaning against the wall. He grinned in a knowing fashion at Ballantine.

"Takin' nothin' on trust, I see," said he. "Well, after yesterday, I dunno but what you're right."

He entered the room, dropped his hat on the floor, and sat down in a chair by the window. Ballantine raised the shade.

"You got Ranger, then?" said he.

"I heard so," said Ballantine, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "Who was Ranger?"

"You didn't stop to ask?"

"He and another gent blazed away at me from behind a tree last night, out to the house. The talkin' that this guy Nevis and me done was with bullets."

"What happened?" asked Joe Durfee, frankly interested, and leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. "How did the trick turn for you?"

"I had the luck," said Ballantine. "I dropped on the ground and nailed him before he could shoot ag'in. That was all. The other gent didn't like the work. He cut and run for it. I had a long ride to get hold of him."

"Good heavens," cried the sheriff, "did

you get the second man, too? Who was he?"

"Nevis was his name."

"You killed Nevis?"

"No, I only caught him."

"What became of him, then? Ranger was enough. You'll get a fat reward for nailing that yegg, but Nevis is worth a dozen of Ranger. Where is he now?"

"He was riding north," said Ballantine, "when I seen him last. He was riding north, saying what he'd do to me."

"He got away, then," sighed Joe Durfee. "Ah, Ballantine, there was the chance of a lifetime. How the devil did he get away?"

"I turned him loose."

"What!"

"I wanted the name of the gent that sent him after me. I turned him loose for telling that."

The sheriff sighed. "Ah," said he, "if I'd been in your boots, I'd either have been a dead man or I'd have had him. Well, Ballantine, what was the name of him that sent Nevis after you?"

"After I find him," said Ballantine, "most likely you'll be called in to see him. Until then, him and me have got a secret between us. Y'understand?"

The sheriff smiled faintly, wistfully. "Ballantine," he said, "tell me flat. What's happened to you?"

"I've growed young," said Ballantine, "and I've got all interested ag'in in toys like this here."

He drew his Colt and handled it with a loving touch.

"It's queer," said the sheriff. "I never knowed you to be a fighting man or a shooting man. But you got Nevis and Ranger both in one night. I never done a day's work like that in all my life, and me a professional!"

He rose. "How long are you in town?"

"I dunno," said Ballantine. "Until something comes along that takes me out of it, I guess."

"Ah? You ain't on the ranch?"

"I'm a gent of leisure, sheriff."

The sheriff gaped at him, started to speak, and then changed his mind. He grew very serious.

"Ballantine," he said, "I come up here primed to talk. But I see there ain't no use. Only, I tell you this: For heaven's sake go soft. You've made a name for yourself. After this, some kinds of trouble will dodge you. Other kinds of trouble will come along to find you out. Leave your Colt have a little sleep, will you?"

So the sheriff departed, and Ballantine went to the wash stand and shaved. Afterward, he went down for breakfast, and found that a dozen men were already there. They were busy talking, busy eating, but a little breath of silence passed over the big noisy room when he entered. Afterward, as he pulled back a chair at a corner table, he could make out a few words in the whisper that went around.

"That's Ballantine now."

"Don't look no different."

"He's turned killer."

"He'll last a while, at that."

Covert whispers, spoken in mumbles through mustaches. And they were balm to the proud heart of Ballantine. Men had never noticed him, before, except to smile. They no longer smiled. And that was enough.

After breakfast he joined the line of loungers on the veranda, looking up and down the street, and across the roofs of the town to big Mount Christopher, watching the light invade the blue hollows one by one, and polish the naked faces of the cliffs with burning light.

The air was close; the sun grew hotter still. A tall, lean fellow with a dull eye stood over his chair.

"There's a little game in the back room. Will you play, Ballantine?"

He barely understood the system of poker, but he went. And when he had been introduced to the four others who

sat around the table in the back room, he found, after all, that the playing of a poker hand is very much like a gun fight—in that it is accomplished with all of one's nerve gathered, and with all of one's force in the eye and the mind. He had to look deep into the scheming brains around that table. He had to cover his own emotions as with a mask; and he had to see through theirs. From that thick sheaf of bills which filled the wallet he had taken from Nevis, he extracted two hundred dollars in the first hour of play. Then, in the second hour, his growing skill told. He had judged his men. He knew when the thin-faced man compressed his lips a little that he had nothing and was prepared to bet to the sky to carry out a bluff. He knew when the fat man's fingers—usually so active and nervous—became still, that he held a hand worth a bet and a big one. And, in such fashion as this, he learned the earmarks of each of the others. It was not difficult. It was only new. In the second hour he took back his lost money and added seventy-five to boot. Then the game broke up. The fat man was broke.

Ballantine went back to the veranda and sat through the cool of the evening. He had made the wages of six weeks in a single afternoon of not unpleasant play. It was surely a better fashion of harvesting the good things of life!

Afterward the tall, thin man with the dull eyes came back to him.

"Partner," he said, "if you and me was to understand each other, there'd be some extra profit in poker for the pair of us!"

"Stranger," said Ballantine, "I ain't never got along particular well with skunks; most of all with crooked skunks!"

He saw gleaming points of fire come into the eyes of the other. But after a moment the man turned away. And Ballantine smiled to himself. It was a pleasant world, an easy world. But one had to understand how to take it by the throat and make it know its master. That was all. He was getting that throat hold now!

That was only a sample of the life of Ballantine during the next few days. He retired late, he slept late. In the afternoon he played poker with whoever chose. And not once did he leave the table a loser. He was waiting, during those days, he hardly knew for what. He felt that the town was watching him, expecting something strange from him. And he himself had the same expectation. The world was all lost in a dream; he himself was the only really wakeful thing in it.

Then, with a shock, came the reward of that expectation of trouble on the horizon of his life.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHANGE OF HEART.

IT was a letter addressed roughly in pencil which the postman brought to him, and inside he found scrawled:

> DEAR MR. BALLANTINE: My friend, Hank Nevis, tells me that you might be expecting me. I'm coming as fast as the train will get me there, which ought to be about a day after this letter gets to you. I hope that we will be able to entertain one another.
>
> PIERRE LACOSTE.

There was no doubt, now, about the name which Nevis had muttered as he rode away to freedom with a grudge in his heart. In Ballantine three impulses rose and faded one after the other. The first was to remain and await the coming of that destroyer from the North. The second was to turn and flee as fast as he could. The third was to take out his revolver and begin practicing for the duel at once.

What he finally did was to go to Joe Durfee.

"Durfee," he said, "tell me about Pierre Lacoste."

Joe Durfee was not an emotional man.

But he changed color and stood up slowly from his chair.

"Is Pierre around here?" he asked faintly.

"Pierre is maybe gunna be here. I want to know something about him."

"Good heavens, Ballantine, you ain't mixed yourself up with him?"

"That ain't the question."

"Pierre? Well, Ballantine, they call some gents devils. Pierre is two devils!"

"What's he done? Of course I've heard about him. But nothin' certain."

The sheriff squinted his eyes. "I met a marshal, once, that knowed the whole history of Lacoste. He begun young learnin' knife work in Canadian lumber camps. He had two dead men behind him when he was fourteen. After that he graduated and got busy with a gun, and what he's done with his guns would need an addin' machine to keep the count of."

"But he ain't bein' hunted?"

"He's one that plays safe. He waits for the other gent to make the first move. Here in the West, where a gent might have to pull a gun almost any time, it's pretty hard to hang a man for shooting another gent in a fair fight. It's pretty hard. And mostly a jury will bring in self-defense. For why? Because all of them jurors figgers that some day *they* might get into a scrape and have to pull a gun, and they want to make sure that if they didn't *pick* the fight, they'll have a chance to come off clear. Y'understand? So, unless somebody actually sees one man come up and take the draw on another and shoot him down, there ain't much chance of hanging a killer. That's what Pierre understands. He found out that in Canada they didn't give a man so much leeway. A killing was a killing up there. So he shifted down into the States, not because he likes the country better, but because he likes the laws better. Now, Ballantine, that's the story of Lacoste boiled down short and sweet. Some folks do a killin' because they hate the other man, and some of 'em kill because they get crazy mad, and some kill because they're drunk and don't know what they're doin'. But once in a while comes along a man that kills for the sake of killin'. Once in fifty years one man comes along that's like that. And that's Pierre."

"He's a great fighter, then?"

"The greatest that ever pulled a gun or a knife. He shoots by instinct the same way as a wolf follers a trail. Up in Lawsonville the three Gregory brothers made up their minds to get rid of Pierre, because they knowed that he was on the trail of Pete Lawson. They went after him and come into the barroom behind him. They didn't even holler. They just pulled their guns and started pumping lead at him. Well, sir, he turned around and dropped all three of 'em—and them as good shots as you ever seen. I used to know Harry Gregory. He was a fine hand with a rifle or with a revolver, and he'd had lots of experience. But the three of them was not good enough for this here Pierre. He killed poor Harry. He wounded the other two. And he didn't get a scratch himself. Some folks said afterward that he must have a charmed life, but that ain't it. The trouble is that most folks, when they sees that long white face of his and the devil in his eyes and the smile on his mouth, get rattled. They're like a man that sees his first deer. They shoot wild. And that's the end of them! I've heard gents talk about shooting grizzlies full of lead. They *know* where their bullets landed. But when you kill that same bear you find that there ain't a single slug in his carcass. That's the way with a gent like Pierre. He's the bear. And the gents that stand up to him are too scared and too excited to know what they're doin'. Now, Ballantine, tell me the truth. Is they any trouble betwe you and Lacoste?"

He turned the matter over and over in his mind. It was on the tip of his tongue to say that he had asked out of merest curiosity. And, having said that, to saddle matchless Overland and ride swiftly away from danger. And yet there was a horrible temptation gripping him, like that which seizes upon a man on the edge of a cliff. Just as the climber feels a grisly joy in the thought of throwing himself into space, so the desire to confront this terrible Pierre swelled in the heart of Ballantine. Moreover, if he fled, Pierre would publish abroad the tidings of his cowardice. Better to die than that! Better to tie himself to the necessity of facing this destroyer from the North.

Suddenly he took out the letter and gave it to the sheriff.

"There it is," said he.

The sheriff read it through twice, mumbling the words aloud. Then he said quietly: "Ballantine, it ain't cowardice if a gent gives Pierre room. Saddle Overland. Hit it south!"

Ballantine smiled. And the smile suggested to his mind still another thought. Since he must need brave this danger, why not brave it as if it were nothing, and no matter how his heart was quaking in him, make it impossible for any man to guess?

"D'you think," said he "that I *fear* Lacoste? Not a bit, Durfee!"

And he left the sheriff with those words, and went out on Overland for a ride. His last long ride, perhaps, on that glorious horse! He stretched it out through the mountains, and Overland went like the very personification of the wind. And when, in the evening, he turned back toward the town, with the plain stretched out in a deep sea of rosy light beneath him, and the huge purple mountains piled against the horizon, he told himself that it was better, far better, to live one free day such as this day had been, than to stretch out weary years of his old existence. And if he died to-morrow with the coming of big Pierre, let him die. The end must come to all men sooner or later. In the meantime, what joy was there in heaven greater than the joy of a swinging canter on the back of glorious Overland?

That great body, like a tireless machine, swept him back into town. He was singing when he came from the barn to the hotel. Perhaps, he thought, that song would never pass through his lips again! And, all gathered in that gentle beauty of the sunset light, he felt stirring about him whatever had been joyous and gay in all his life. All that had been dreadful with weary labor and hopelessness, was forgotten now. He thought of his childhood, most of all, and in it the voice and the face of his mother; he thought of the first proud days when he was the "boy rancher" of all that district, pointed out and commented upon by older men. And, last and brightest, he thought of pretty Peggy Holbrook. Indeed, she had never been out of his mind in that wild time which followed his re-creation.

He went in through the back door and the first person he encountered was the burly proprietor himself, coming out of the kitchen. He caught the arm of Ballantine.

"Is it true?" he gasped out.

"What?"

"Pierre Lacoste——"

"Of course. Why not, partner?"

The eye of the other filled with cold curiosity and horror, as though he were even then looking upon a dead corpse.

"We'll be wishin' you luck," he muttered, and followed Ballantine with his glance as the latter walked away, then called: "Will and your sister are waitin' for you."

What could they want? They were in his room, and when he entered they sprang up to meet him. How changed they were already! All the flippant and self-centered satisfaction was gone

from the face of Sylvia. Will Ballantine showed a sun-reddened set of features, and weary eyes. It was Sylvia who ran to him as he opened the door.

"Oh, Chris, dear old Chris!" she said. "They haven't told us the truth, or you wouldn't be so carefree. It isn't true, Chris!"

"What?" he asked her.

"About that man Lacoste——"

Will came on his other side. There was no denying the reality of the emotion which he showed.

"Chris," he said, "hurry up and tell us that there's nothing in it. Old man——"

"How's the ranch?" asked Ballantine.

"Never mind the ranch—we want to know——"

He saw that he could not dodge them. "I'm going to meet up with Lacoste," he told them. "It'll be good for the range to have him done for. That's all there is to it."

Sylvia, with a moan, covered her face.

"Why not?" asked Ballantine. "Do you think that I'm afraid of him? Not at all! These bullies, Will—they go down easily when a man faces them."

The mouth of Will Ballantine set hard; then he said slowly: "It's no use, Sylvia. He's made up his mind. There's only one thing to do, and I'll do it. I'm going to be with you——"

"You'll stay on the ranch," directed Ballantine. "That's all of that! I don't need help. Now tell me how it goes."

"Sylvia, go out and wait for me," said Will.

"Oh, Chris——" she began, and then, seeing the iron in his face, as though she realized suddenly that words were useless, she choked back a sob and ran from the room. Will Ballantine walked a turn or two up and down the room, fighting with himself.

At last he said suddenly: "Chris, for heaven's sake try to dodge this thing. You'll find a new family life if you'll come back to us. I don't mean that we want you back there to do the fighting all by yourself. I'm going to let law go hang for a few years until we've seen this trouble through. Sylvia discharged Alice. She's doing the cooking and working like a Trojan."

"I saw her hands," said Ballantine, with a warm glow of satisfaction spreading through him.

"But we need you—as the head of the family. We need you as our brother, dear old Chris, and because since you broke out and left us, we've had a chance to think things over, and we can see just how much you've had to put up with. Chris, if you can come back to us, you'll find a different atmosphere. The nonsense is completely out of Sylvia. I hope to Heaven that it's out of me. We needed the whip, and you gave it to us. I only wish that you'd done it ten years ago!"

To Ballantine it was a moment only less great than that in which he struck big Jeff Partridge to the ground and then crushed Harry Reddick like a brittle thing. He took the hand of his brother and wrung it.

"Will," he said, "this makes me feel rich. If there was ever any doubt in my mind about Lacoste before, it's gone now. I'm going to beat him because I *have* to beat him. There's too much left for me to live for."

CHAPTER XIV.

PIERRE LACOSTE.

HIS brother and sister were not the last to come to him on that night. He had hardly finished his supper and gone out onto the veranda, when Patrick Reddick arrived and took him out under the pines for a serious talk. The burden of what he had to say was most strange to one whom the banker had used with such brutal frankness a few days before.

"Ballantine," he said, in the beginning, "the first essential in a business

man must be the courage to change his mind when he finds he has been wrong. Ballantine, I was wrong. I was wrong about you. I've come to you to-night to tell you two things. The first is that I made a mistake about you. The second is that your credit is good in my bank again. Good for enough, say, to push through your little irrigation scheme. That is not charity. Simply good business. When I talked to you last, you were not man enough to put through a job of that size. Now you are man enough to put through almost anything."

It was a tribute strong enough to have made the head of Ballantine swim at any other time, but when a man expects to live not more than twenty-four hours, his brain is cool as steel. So it was with Ballantine.

There followed a strange recital from the banker. He had had a night visit from Hank Nevis, who tried to extract blackmail from him, threatening, otherwise, to reveal that Harry Reddick had hired the assassins to attempt the life of Ballantine. And, when the banker refused money, he had ended by declaring that Harry Reddick was done for anyway, because Ballantine already knew who the employer was.

"I've waited two more days," said Reddick, "to see if you intended to let the world know about Harry. You haven't done it. I don't believe you intend to. So I've done two things. I've sent Harry out of the country to try to make his way in a new place; and I've come to you to thank you for keeping your mouth shut!"

There followed more business talk. There was no doubt about his sincerity. He backed it up by a flat offer of money—more than enough to push through that irrigation scheme in the bottom lands and to replenish the stocking of the ranch.

"Reddick," said the other, "a week ago I was worth about a nickel to you. What's made the difference? A gun fight?"

"A week ago you wouldn't fight. And fighters are what the world needs. That's all! Men who fight their way out of trouble. *I'm* a fighter, Ballantine. That's why I understand. There's only one proviso—don't stay here to meet Pierre Lacoste. That's suicide! Take a vacation. I'll finance it. Let him come and go again."

But Ballantine shook his head. He listened for a few more minutes while the other argued, then he said finally: "Suppose, Mr. Reddick, that you was in my boots and my age, and a gent wrote you a letter like Lacoste wrote to me. What would you do?"

It silenced Pat Reddick. Ballantine watched him walk thoughtfully away. Then he went back to the stable behind the hotel, took out the stallion, and rode him toward the house of John Holbrook. He had made up his mind that since that wild scene at the conquering of Overland, neither the rancher nor his daughter would care to see him again. But if Reddick had changed so much, why might not Holbrook have at least forgiven him? And Peggy, as well?

He tethered the big black outside the corral near the poplars and went up to the house. They were both on the veranda. He could see the glow pulse and die in the bowl of Holbrook's pipe, and smell the fragrance of the rich tobacco. He could make out the pale outline of the girl sitting near her father. And, at that, such emotion came over Ballantine that he grew weak—weak as in the old days when the presence of the girl had ever turned him mute. He paused in front of the steps, fighting for speech. Then came the sudden voice of Holbrook.

"Ballantine!"

The rancher jumped up and ran down the steps to him, caught him by the arm, and dragged him to the porch. There Peggy came to him. A flood of ques-

tions poured out upon him. About Overland, about himself, about the fight with Nevis and Ranger, about his new life, and most of all, the wild tale that terrible Pierre Lacoste was coming from the Northland to encounter him. Where were his doubts of their cordiality now?

"But this talk," said the rancher, "of your staying to meet that man-killer—it's nonsense, eh, my boy?"

He hesitated.

Then from Peggy Holbrook: "You won't do that, Chris?"

"Do you want me to turn my back on him?" he asked sharply.

"Would you stand still to meet a mad dog?" she asked him in return.

"That's it, Chris," said the older man. "A mad dog, with poison in his teeth. That's what Lacoste is!"

"They have to be killed, things like that," answered Ballantine.

"But you——" began Holbrook warmly.

"He's right," said the girl as suddenly as before. "If he feels that way, he's right to face him. If I were a man—I'd do the same thing, if I could. But, oh, Chris, that it should have to be you!"

It was all in her manner of saying that simple thing which made it seem to Ballantine the most marvelous of music. And he carried the sound of her voice away with him when they came out to watch him mount Overland.

"No more whip and spur?" asked Holbrook.

"I was a fool," said Ballantine. "There's nothing worth while that has to be flogged into doing things. I never touch him now with more than a word. Good-by!"

He went off swiftly through the night, through the lane, and down the road. A pale half moon was plowing through thin drifts of high clouds, throwing up a steady spray of ghostly white. Now and then it broke through and dappled the ground with the shadows of the trees. But on the whole, it gave the world only a dull, uncertain light.

And by that light, swinging onto the main road again, he saw a big man sitting on a small horse, a horse with a wild, ragged mane blowing in the wind and ears flattened; a rider wearing a high, peaked cap of fur; a tall rider with a long, thin face. Pierre Lacoste!

He knew it even with the first fall of his eyes on the stranger. And he drew rein at once. The dust cloud which Overland raised as he plowed to a halt, blew before them and veiled the stranger with a fog of white. Through it he spoke.

"Ballantine?"

That hard, serene, confident voice withered the tongue of Ballantine at the root. He could not answer. And the stranger continued: "I meet you tomorrow, Ballantine, in the street, in front of the hotel, at noon, monsieur, when there will be others to watch us and see that there is—fair play!"

And as he spoke, he laughed, softly, like the purring of a great savage cat when it holds a mouse between its paws.

CHAPTER XV.

THE THIRD BULLET.

KILL that man in fair fight without some previous advantage, Ballantine knew that he could not. And as he rode to town he turned the matter slowly in his mind—slowly, with prickles of horror still running cold along his spine. Not unless Pierre Lacoste were half disarmed would he have a chance against that ghoul of a man. But how disarm him? He thought again of the sneering, savage laughter of Pierre. One thing, indeed, might touch him—scorn might madden him. But who would dare scorn Pierre Lacoste to his face? Only one thing in the world could have courage enough to do that, and that one thing was the bodiless monster, Rumor!

The plan was half born in the mind

of Ballantine when he fell asleep that night. It was fully formed when he sprang out of bed in the morning. He went down to breakfast with a cheerful mien. And men looked upon him as upon one already dead.

"Ballantine," said the proprietor, whispering, "maybe I'm takin' my life in my hands to tell you even this much. But the fact is that they's some that says that he's in town already, or hangin' around waitin' for you!"

"Ah, yes," said Ballantine, and he shrugged his shoulders. "I've seen him already."

"You've seen him? And you're alive, man?"

"I dunno how it was," scoffed Ballantine. "I was as close to him as he was to me. But he didn't make a move to his gun. Maybe he's losin' his nerve, d'you think? He seen me face to face, and he didn't dare to stir!"

That was all, but perhaps it was enough. It was a lie, no doubt, and a black one, but against so horrible a phantom as this Pierre Lacoste were not weird weapons permissible? After that he went back to his room and waited. It was not a pause of five hours until noon. It was five hideous centuries of suspense. And every fifth minute, which was a year's length in agony, he said to himself: "When I go out to face him and die, will I break down—will my nerve quit cold? Will I fall on my knees and beg him not to kill me? God give me strength!"

When noon came, he looked down through the crevice at the bottom of his drawn window shade which kept out the flare of the sunlight, and so he could see, plainly, the form of Pierre Lacoste when he came riding in on his ragged mustang with the famous peaked fur cap on his head. A terrible face it was that Ballantine saw, more dreadful by day than by night—a bloodless, lifeless face. Only the lips lived, and sneered.

He disappeared under the awning over the watering troughs. Then he came out again, and he came with a rush, and stared up and down the street. He snatched off his cap and cast it down into the dust and trampled on it, and exposed a head covered with a mist of long, thin, blond hair, like the hair of an old man. The sun turned it to silver—a cloud of silver fire around that terrible face.

He had been told. Some one—and Ballantine wondered who—had told him of the thing that he, Ballantine, had said that very morning and Pierre Lacoste was going mad with rage and impatience.

How long would he wait before he started to search, started, perhaps in the hotel itself? Yonder were the crowded windows, yonder was the hushed street, with only the whisper of the wind and the dust cloud moving through it. Seconds were precious, now, for they were feeding on the very soul of Pierre Lacoste!

At last Ballantine himself could stand it no longer. He rose and looked to his gun. He felt very calm, but weak. He could not feel his heart beat. He took off his hat. And then he went down the stairs. When he reached the lobby, one of the men who stood at the windows turned and saw him, and he winced back with a spasm crossing his face, as though Ballantine had held a gun to his head.

And Ballantine knew, by that, that his own face was ghastly. Outside in the street he could hear the voice of Lacoste raving—broken English—broken French *patois*. He paused, gathered all his strength, and set his teeth to force a smile upon his lips. Then he stepped through the door onto the veranda. He cried out—and his voice rang amazingly strong and true.

"Lacoste, you coyote, turn around and face me!"

And Lacoste turned in the middle of the street, and when he saw Ballantine, he uttered a wild cry of savage fury.

There was no question here of waiting for the other man to draw his gun. Pierre himself made the first move for all men to see, tearing furiously at the butt of his Colt—and in his haste entangling it in some way. Perhaps it was the friction of the sight—for the gun was new—against the holster. At any rate, Ballantine saw the split second of delay, and in that instant he dreamed of victory. He jerked out his own gun and fired, fired again; then out of nothingness something struck him over the eyes and he was down.

When his senses returned to him, he saw John Holbrook leaning above him. And he caught at the rancher's hand.

"Holbrook, did I——" he muttered.

"The third bullet did it—the one you fired after you hit the ground," said Holbrook. "He dropped in his tracks. It went straight throught the brain."

"The *third* bullet?" asked Ballantine; then spoke no more. The pain in his head had grown too intolerable to admit of speech.

It was the last time he ever drew a gun. And, of course, it was the last time he ever had to. The slayer of Pierre Lacoste did not need to demonstrate his formidable skill again. But, when he was a prosperous rancher with five hundred acres of irrigated bottom land, he used to say to his wife, Peggy: "It was Providence that saved my life. I dunno how I ever escaped the bullets fired by Pierre Lacoste."

TO PRESERVE ROOSEVELT CABIN

THE Roosevelt Cabin, once occupied by Theodore Roosevelt, when recuperating at the old Maltese Ranch, seven miles south of the village of Medora, in the Little Missouri bad lands of North Dakota, is to be preserved in a fitting shrine, according to the State Historical Society of North Dakota. Lewis F. Crawford, curator of the society, is preparing plans for a stone shrine of stately and substantial design to be erected over the building.

The cabin is of historical interest to North Dakota and the Northwest. No other building in the State of North Dakota has traveled so much. It was taken from the Maltese Ranch, where it had stood for more than twenty years, and shipped to the St. Louis Exposition in 1904. At the close of the exposition the cabin was returned to Bismark and set up on the capitol grounds. The building is constructed of pine logs, cut on the upper waters of the Little Missouri in 1880-81.

BEAR TREES BOY

TWO cub bears a short time ago proved the undoing and afterward the salvation of Murl Streeter, a sixteen-year-old boy, who came upon a family of bears while he was fishing near Highbridge, Michigan. Young Streeter became separated from his party and proceeded to investigate a noise which he heard in a clump of brushes near the bank of the stream. He supposed the noise was made by his father, who had accompanied him. He met, however, two cub bears.

The mother bear, a few feet away, started immediately to chase Streeter through the woods. Choosing a tree which seemed to offer exceptional opportunities of safety, he climbed to the top. The she bear and the cubs stood below, holding him captive. To all appearances he was marooned for the rest of the day, but presently one of the cubs became interested in something elsewhere. The mother and the other cub followed, and then the captive saw his opportunity. He climbed down the tree and hastened back to civilization.

The Cunning of Rex

By Austin Hall

Author of "Guardian of the Wild," etc.

"OU LA LA! Now you watch zat dog!"

Jean la Jennette, sheep-herder par excellence, and Iberian by birth, waved his long cigarette and sang a crescendo of justified exultation. From his high seat on the top rail of the fence he was regaling his fellow herders with the promises of the morning. The motley crowd had gathered about and was waiting.

"See! Now you watch. Zat dog she goin' tell how she count zat sheep. One. Two. Tree! Five hoonderd! She's all ze same. I tell you wat, zat dog she count like ze Bosco!"

For three days now Jean had reigned supreme, lording it over his fellows and treating them to tests of canine intelligence; and now he was coming to the supreme test that would give him the cup that he had coveted. Out of that silver bowl of triumph Jean had boasted that he would drink the toast of victory and *"Ou la la!"* what a celebration it would be! The sheep-herders were gathered about the fence waiting for the signal and watching the three thousand sheep packed against the corrals, where to one side the old dog was standing, his stub tail up and his head alert for the signal. Behind him were the wagons of the sheep owners, with the judges standing to one side. The master of ceremonies made a notation, waved the judges to their places, and motioned to Jean la Jennette.

"She's all right, Jean. Let him go."

Following which the sheep-herder on the fence straightened up, held one hand aloft, and made a sweep with his arm, swinging it in a circle and bringing it back to the perpendicular position above his head.

"Ou la la, Rex! Zat ees so, yes. One hoonderd! *Ou la.* For Jean la Jennette!"

Immediately the dog began working leisurely along the pack in one of those maneuvers that were the wonder of the sheepmen, his black and tan body standing out in relief against the white sheep pack. The sheep watched out of flat slitted eyes, stirred uneasily, and began milling. The dog allowed them to mill for a minute and then cut them away from the corral fence. From Jean la Jennette came the shrill whistle that signaled the next maneuver. "Whsssst! Whssst! *Ou la!* Now you coot heem out. One hoonderd! Jean she's want

one hoonderd sheep!" Following which the dog spread the flock out in pear formation with the sheep thinned out at the point of the pack; then with full leisure and without any ado, he cut off the point. The judges stepped forward and the count was on. The tally said ninety-six. From the fence came the shrill exultation of the old sheep-herder. *"Ou la la. Oui oui!* Never you beat zat dog! Zat Rex she do reethmetic more better zan ze Bosco. Soom day we will learn heem to read out of ze book." The judge smiled, patted the old dog on the head, and motioned Jean to go on. The test went on to two, three and up to five hundred; at five hundred it stopped, five seeming to be the limit of the dog's understanding.

Nevertheless it seemed to be enough for the several hundred sheep owners who had gathered to watch the great sheep-dog classic. One of the judges called the dog and began tying a blue ribbon about his shaggy neck; another motioned to Jean la Jennette. There was a murmur among the herders as the old man wriggled from the perch that for three days had been his seat of operations; then a stampede to the semicircle of sheepmen. An official bearing a bulky parcel was shaking Bob Arnold, the legal owner of Rex and Jean's boss, by the hand, but Bob laughed and turned to Jean la Jennette.

"She's all right, boys," he said. "I'm almighty proud to be the legal owner of Rex and to win this cup, but I would never have done it without Jean la Jennette. Allow me to introduce to you the greatest sheep-dog trainer in America, Jean la Jennette, half dog, half Bosco, and all sheep-herder."

It was a proud moment for Jean la Jennette. Never in his wildest moment had he dreamed of coming to such a height as this; for a moment he stood abashed with the silver cup in his arms and the old dog at his side. The judges were talking, and their words seemed far away, but at last he got the drift of what they were trying to say—they were congratulating him upon his work as a trainer and not giving credit enough to the dog; and that would never do. Why did they not talk of Rex? He smiled and shook his head.

"Non non," he said when the judge ceased speaking. "She's not Jean la Jennete zat wins zat cup. I tell you she's zat dog. Zat dog she's smart lak the devil. Jean she's know it w'en zat dog she's no bigger'n ze leetle apple. So Jean she's take zat leetle pup and puts heem on ze sheep's teet, so she knows hees mama. Zat mama ees ze best thing in ze world to zat puppy. He loves zat mama and he loves zat sheep. And so zat dog she jus' grow. Jean, she's do notting but jus' watch and mebbe so tell zat dog a leetle bit. *Oui oui!* Zat ees so. Always we live wiz ze sheep. At night zat puppy she's sleep by Jean la Jennette's head an' she sleep all night with one eye open. *Ou la!* Why? Because zat wolf she come over ze mountain an' she howl because she's hungry to kill zat sheep. An' zat puppy she's growl and wake Jean la Jennette. *Oui oui!* Eet ees so. And we get up and she's kill zat wolf. Then he learn queeck; and he learns hees Jean la Jennette also. Ze blood of ze wolf ees ze blood of *le diable*. Zat dog she know. Zat blood mak' zat dog one *diable* also. He's smart lak the devil. He knows zat sheep and he loves heem also. Jean she's jus' tell heem leetle bit. Zat Rex she have one brain. Jean she's show heem something—not much. More time zat dog she's tellin' Jean la Jennette."

All of which was the culmination of a dream of old Felix Gridley, the great sheep grower of Colorado, a dream that had to do with a classic that was as unique as it was extraordinary—sheep dog—a test of intelligence, herding instinct, and canine genius. Old Felix had got the idea at a dog show in Chicago. He had gone to that dog show to see

something, and he had seen it—a dog show based on points. The old fellow had wandered through that building looking at poodles, Pomeranians, Chows, Chihuahuas, and what not, and he had come out with a snort of disgust. To a friendly bootlegger around the corner he had confided the burden of his woe.

"Say, city feller, I ain't nuthin' but a ornery old cuss with nuthin' but some thousands o' sheep and a couple counties o' land out there in Colorado, and mebbe I don't know much, but I know that we got some better dags than them out in my country. I got a notion tuh put on a show of my own. And say—say—this redeye yuh got here has got pitchforks in it. What was I a-sayin'? Oh yes—I'm a-goin' tuh put on a show, ain't I? An' it's a-goin' tuh be a sheep-dawg show. And I'm goin' tuh give a silver cup—big one too—hold a quart—yessir—a whole quart—and there won't be a dog-gone point in the whole dang show—nuthin' but just brains. If yuh want tuh see brains yuh got tuh get a sheep dawg. Say, lissen. I got dawgs out tuh my place that kin do 'rithmetic and there's some of 'em in this here country that kin do algebray. Yuh jus' come out tuh my place an' yuh'll see something."

The bootlegger had not come, but just the same old Felix had gone through with his boast. Just now he was standing in serene grandeur, his white whiskers rifting in the wind and a real dog on either side, backing up the judges who were complimenting Jean la Jennette. The show had been a success. The sheepmen with their herders had come from every state in the West, and for three days the smartest dogs in the country had gone through their cleverest paces. There had not been one dog that had not had some special knack to stir the wonder of the sheepmen. The tests were real—sheep driving, herding, flanking, identification, picking the burro, riding the flocks, all the tests of a sheep dog's curriculum. There had been three days of it, and then had come the deciding events of individuality, each dog doing his own individual specialty, and out of it all had come this final with Arnold's bobtailed Rex doing his arithmetic. Jean la Jennette had caught up Rex and was holding his tam-o'-shantered head close to that of the sheep dog. He drew up the dog's head so that all could see the tan markings under the chin.

"Ou la!" he exclaimed. "See. When *le bon Dieu* she mak a dog she leave hees mark. *Oui oui!* Eet ees so. Ze long hairs under ze chin she ees ze mark o' *le bon Dieu.* Each of them hair she worth one thousand dollar. See. Zat Rex she got seven. Seven thousand dollar. Never you beat zat tam dog."

And that night the sheep-herders celebrated out of the private stock of old Felix Gridley. True to his word Jean drained the silver cup in genuine Iberian fashion. There was never such a night and there never could be another. When Bob Arnold looked in at one o'clock Jean was squatting on the floor, the dog in his arms, chanting a melody of his sheep-loving ancestors. Bob had words for his sheep-herder. In the morning Bob was taking the train West, so he had brought Jean's ticket for California; also he wished to instruct Jean about the dog Rex. The dog would have to ride in the baggage car and Bob warned Jean to be careful. That was all; and Jean understood.

That is, he understood at the time, but when morning came and he found the long ticket in his pocket, he had to go to one of the sheep growers to find out what it meant. Then he remembered that the Monsieur Bob had come into his room some time the night before and warned him about a baggage car. But what that warning was about he did not know. It worried him. Consequently when Jean boarded the westbound train that afternoon, he was very careful. Rex was given to the care of the baggage man and Jean was given a

check; also, the train man was the richer by ten dollars of Jean's hard-earned money.

What had the Monsieur Bob said about that baggage car? That afternoon Jean sat in the smoking car wondering what it could have been. Twice that day and next morning he got off and went ahead to see, but each time the old dog was sitting solemnly in his corner, a bit perturbed but still resigned to his fate. Each time the dog got up, wagged his tail, and whined. The baggage man smiled. "He's all right, old man. He and me is good friends."

"Oui oui," Jean would say. "Zat ees good. I have one check and you have one dog. Zat dog she worth many thousand dollar. You no geev heem unless you get ze check."

But fate was pursuing Jean la Jennette. There had been another man beside himself to get off and go ahead to that car. Jean had seen him and knew him as a sheepman, but he had no thought of the man's intentions. When they went back, the man occupied the same seat with Jean la Jennette. Jean talked and the man talked with him. The man knew sheep, and he knew dogs. And after a while Jean la Jennette fell asleep.

But the man knew a whole lot besides dogs. He knew that they had passed a division on the railroad and that the man in the baggage car to whom Jean had given the ten-dollar tip had been relieved and that another man had taken his place. The man smoked peacefully and while he smoked the mountains in the south grew closer. Suddenly he reached very sotfly into Jean's pocket and drew out the white check. The train was drawing up to a siding at a little way station.

The man must have been familiar with the railroad schedule, for immediately upon the stopping of the train he got off. Beside the track was a man in a wagon, holding a dog on the seat. The dog was a bobtailed shepherd, with black and tan markings. The man in the wagon spoke.

"All right, Len. I got him. How about Rex?"

The man with the cigar nodded his satisfaction and went ahead to the baggage car. The baggage man was busy, but when the other came forward, showed his check, and motioned to the dog, he stopped.

"Want the dog now?"

"Just for a few minutes," said the man with the cigar. "We're stoppin' for fifteen minutes, ain't we? Little air'll do him good."

Old Rex demurred a bit, but when the man patted him on the head and called him by name, he hopped to the ground. Whereupon the man led him along the track to the waiting wagon. The other was ready. It took but a minute to change the collars of the dogs and transfer them. The man in the wagon held Rex while the other started back with the strange dog.

"Yuh sure yuh kin get away with it, Len?"

"Easy," answered the other. "These dogs is both bobtails, and that baggage fellow doesn't know the diffi; and that crazy Bosco's asleep. Bob Arnold wants one thousand dollars for one of them pups, but we ain't payin' nothin'. Me? I'll get back on that car and ride to Sacramento. When that Bosco gets off he'll just about throw a fit, but we'll be riding easy with our alibi. See! You just take him back to the ranch and try him out. He's some sheep dog."

Everything worked like a charm. A dog is a dog and a trainman has no time to go into points; the fellow had taken a bobtailed dog out of the car and had come back with the same thing, and that settled that. The man returned to the smoker, lighted a cigar, and returned the check to Jean's pocket. Then he fell asleep.

All was well with Jean la Jennette;

twice he awoke that night and once long enough to get something to eat; then he went back to sleep. The train rambled through Nevada and down the Sierras into Sacramento. At Sacramento Jean would get off, go forward for his dog, and take another train for the ranch. And once home? What tales he would have to tell! He could see the sheep-herders of his own set listening, could hear their murmurs for old Rex and could see their admiring eyes on the silver goblet. Jean was happy.

But he was happy only until he reached Sacramento. When the train stopped he ran forward and presented his check for the dog. The baggage man was not the same, but that did not matter; there was a dog in the car and Jean thought that it was Rex. The trainman nodded curtly and stepped back; then he came forward with the dog. Jean looked up quizzically.

"Non non," he said pleasantly. "Zat not my dog."

The trainman was a blunt, heavy man. "That ain't your dog?" he snapped out. "What are you talking about? That's the dog that goes with that check."

Jean thought that the man was joking, but by the same token the man was busy and began lowering the dog. Jean saw that he meant business.

"Non non!" he began shouting. "Jean she's want zat Rex. W'at you t'ink? You steal? Jean she's kill."

"Go on!" shouted the busy trainman. "You're crazy with the heat! Here's your dog. There's only been one dog in this car and that's him."

Jean was nonplused. Unused to city ways and crowded places he lost his head. The trainman was busy, but he was not too busy to be the recipient of a string of oaths hatched out of four languages. Trunks were raining about and people shunting to and fro. Jean stormed. He held the strange dog by the leash and shouted for Rex. Suddenly he ran for the baggage car and began climbing in, whereat the trainman deliberately placed his foot against Jean's face and gave it a shove. Jean went sprawling. That brought a crowd, also a policeman. The officer picked up the sheep-herder and looked up at the baggage man. The train was just pulling out. The trainman looked down with a cold smile.

"Nutty!" he shouted. "Just plain nuts. Lock him up!"

And so it certainly looked to the policeman. Jean arose sputtering a crescendo of curses, struck madly at his captor, and took out after the moving train. But it was too late, the passenger coaches were getting into their stride. As the smoker went by a man pulling on a black cigar leaned out of the window and laughed. But Jean did not see.

He wailed loudly, waving both hands. *"Ou la la!* Zat dog she gone now for sure. Ze Monsieur Bob she know. Zat baggage! Now zat Rex she's stolen. Ten t'ousand dollar!"

The words stolen and "ten thousand dollars" pricked the ears of the policeman. He was holding the dog by the chain; once again he collared Jean la Jennette. He pointed to the dog. The crowd had formed a circle.

"Ain't that your dog, Bosco?"

"Non non," shouted Jean la Jennette. "Zat dog? Jean, she does not know heem. *Ou la la!* Ten t'ousand dollar! She steal. Oh, monsieur!"

"Oh the devil!" murmured the policeman. "We'll just take you up to the station for safe-keeping."

And so Jean la Jennette and the dog that he did not want, received a ride in the patrol wagon. At the station a kindly sergeant took charge of the situation; the sergeant had tact, and by dint of soft words and patience got at the crux of the difficulty. Jean finally brought forth the silver cup and sat it on the table.

"See? Rex she's win zat cup and now some one she's want zat Rex. Ze

monsieur she's say watch zat baggage. Mebbe so ze Monsieur Bob she know. Zat dog I tell you she's worth ten t'ousand dollar."

The cup clinched the case for Jean la Jennette. The sergeant had read of the sheep-dog sweepstake, and the matter of the dog's value was a fact of publicity. The dog must be found, but to do it there must be a certain amount of red tape. In the meantime, Jean would be better on his way.

"Well," he said, "we'll find your dog. We'll wire ahead and do what we can. You get in touch with your boss. The railroad will have to make good. They'll go a long way before they pay a bill like that."

"Oui oui," spoke the disconsolate Jean la Jennette. "All right. But who she's goin' get zat dog?"

"Oh, you'll get your dog."

But Jean was not so sure. He had planned a great home-coming, and now it had all come to this. When he got off the train at the ranch that night the sheep-herders, to whom the exploits of Rex were just as much as they were to Jean la Jennette, were there en masse. And that was too much. Jean broke into tears, pointing at the mongrel bobtail.

"Zat baggage she's steal zat Rex an' give me bum dog instead. Jean, she's fool. Zat train she's go lak the devil, an' Jean she no can do. Ze monsieur she's say 'baggage,' and mebbe so ze monsieur she know. Zat Rex she's gone now for sure."

It took an hour to get at the grist of his trouble, but when it was got, Charley Yerring, the ranch superintendent, got on the wire with Bob Arnold and also with the railroad. Likewise he tried to reassure Jean la Jennette, but that was pretty hard to do. That night Jean went off by himself and hid away under the lea of the shearing pens. For hours he sat there moaning to himself, shedding tears, and smoking his long cigarettes. The moon went down and the stars redoubled their twinkling glory. And then the spirit of *le bon Dieu* spoke to Jean la Jennette. He felt stronger, and he stood up.

"Ou la," he spoke. "Mebbeso zat baggage she's t'ink she's steal zat dog. But zat Rex she will show him some-t'ing also. Zat Rex she's smart lak the devil. Now mebbeso *le bon Dieu* she's show zat dog, and mebbeso she's tell him w'at to do. Jean, she's goin' bet on zat dog."

The railroad had fallen into something. Here was a dog loaded on a car, one taken off, and a ten-thousand-dollar value missed in between. The baggage man was called in and swore that the dog was the same. Only Jean la Jennette and everybody else said that it wasn't. For reasons of his own the baggage man did not say anything about the dog being taken off the train. The railroad stood adamant and procrastinated. Ten thousand is a big value. Detectives were put on the case, but in no place could they clear up the manner of the dog's switch. The culpable trainman, knowing his probable guilt, kept a close watch all along the route, but there was no dog like Rex. Then he was transferred, and about the same time Bob Arnold brought suit. The newspapers got wind of it, and it was a good story. Bob Arnold tried to reassure Jean la Jennette.

"Never mind, Jean," he said. "The railroad will have to pay. We'll get the ten thousand. So don't worry."

Arnold, of course, would rather have had the dog, but he was standing on that much to reassure Jean la Jennette. But the sheep-herder shook his head.

"Non non, monsieur. Zat baggage she's give nottings. Zat baggage she's t'ief an' she keep zat ten t'ousand also. But zat baggage she's no keep zat Rex. No sirree! Zat Rex she's smart dog. Soom day zat Rex she come, but she not come from zat railroad. You wait. Bimeby *le bon Dieu* she's goin' tell zat dog. An' w'en she do zat dog she's goin'

come to hees good Jean la Jennette. Zat dog she mebbe walk one t'ousand mile. *Ou la la!* You see."

And strange things had happened to Rex.

The old dog had ridden in the train on his way to the sweepstakes, so that the experience in the baggage car on the return trip was not a new one. Nevertheless he did not like it. All his life he had been fooled by the strange ways of the man things who were his masters. There was ever something new that he had to take for granted. The train had rumbled and roared and there had been many men peeking in at the door. He longed for Jean la Jennette. And then the man had come, had patted him on the head, and had spoken his name. And the man smelled of sheep. Very meekly and gladly he had walked with him along the track to the waiting wagon. There was a dog of his own kind in the wagon, and that made it better than ever. Everything was all right now, and he was happy. They would take him to Jean la Jennette. He saw the man undo the collar on the other dog and then he felt his own being unlinked. Down the track the engine was puffing and spitting for the start. The man who had taken him into the wagon had patted him on the head and spoken his name. The two men began talking. The train started and the man with the cigar began running. Then the train had roared down the track and had vanished in the distance.

It was another experience for old Rex. The man turned the wagon around and headed for the mountains that loomed in the south. For an hour they ran along the lowlands, and then they began climbing. The air had a sweet tang, and there was a scent of sage, and shortly after sundown there was the sweetest smell that can come to a sheep dog. The man had been holding one hand on the dog and driving with the other, when Rex got that smell. He stood up. He whined and looked up into the man's face.

"Yea? Guess Len was right all righto. Yuh kin smell 'em, eh? How you know there's a band o' sheep ahead? Sheep dog? Well, I'll guess." Then when they had rounded a bend and come upon the flock. "There they are, old feller. Hey, Bill! Come 'ere."

The man with the sheep looked up and came over to the road. He was a decrepit figure with unshorn locks; when he was close by the wagon he stopped and looked in.

"So that's him, eh? So that's that durn champeen? Len's got his gall, Jim. Len's got his gall. But then Len always would steal a dog, wouldn't he? And a dog like that! Say, I bet it was done pretty, wasn't it?"

The man in the wagon winked a wicked eye. "I'll say it was. Len's a vicious gazabo w'en it comes tuh havin' his way. This here Arnold cuss from Californy wants a thousand fer one of them pups, eh? So Len jus' natcherly takes the whole works, eh? Done pretty? I'll say! And now Len he's gone tuh Sacramento with a alibi. An' we got the dog an' we're a-goin' tuh keep 'im. And they ain't no one findin' it out 'cause we ain't a-tellin'. Whatcha think?"

"Fine dog."

"Betcha. Well, I'll take 'im tuh the ranch house and lock 'im up fer the night. In the morning we'll see what he knows about sheep."

There are some men, inherently honest as a rule, who can't keep their hands off a dog. Len Korney was that kind of man. When he had seen Rex at the sweepstakes, his canine kleptomania had got the better of him. He just had to have Rex, and that was all there was to it, but for all that he would make a good master.

That night Rex slept in a box stall. It was a strange place, but inasmuch as there was a smell of horses and sheep,

he was satisfied. He had been moved many times before, but always, some time during the moving, there would come Jean la Jennette. Jean was the tangible thing of his heart and the core of his dreams. He dreamed of him now. All through the night he lay curled up on the straw, yipping an accompaniment to his slumberous adventures—sheep—sheep—coyotes—and most of all of Jean la Jennette. When he awoke there was the smell of horses and a man at the door. The man motioned, and Rex came out. There was a crowd in the corral, and a cluster of dogs. Rex's hair stood on end.

"Hey, Jim! Kin he fight?" called one of the men. "He may be a sheep dog, but he ain't no business on the Korney Ranch less'n he kin hold his own."

And so Rex had his fight. He caught the dog coming on and sent him spinning. The dog landed at the man's feet. The man rolled him over casually with his foot.

"I'll say he kin fight. Guess he kin linger 'round this ol' ranch if he wants tuh, eh?"

It was all proper to old Rex. Here were sheep, and many of them—also there were mountains and distance—and the fresh air of the open desert. It was good to go after the sheep—to show them off and to put them through. He started the flock and jumped upon the packed backs as he had been taught by Jean la Jennette. The maneuver brought a roar of applause from the men.

"Some little ol' wagon, eh?" called the man Jim. "Him! He don't walk. Jus' starts 'em up an' rides. Good lookout, too. Say, watch!"

The burro leading the pack had taken a mulish notion to fight flies. He stopped, but at the same moment the dog had crossed the pack and was at his heels. The burro stuck his tail between his legs and scooted. The flock began moving, but a whistle from the man brought it to a stop. Rex lay down.

"Yuh can't beat 'im, I'm tellin' yuh. Fancy Len a-keepin' his paws off'n a dog like that? Well, he's ourn, an' they ain't a-goin' tuh be no one take 'im away."

But there was one thing on which the man had not reckoned. Rex was turned loose, and for a while he was satisfied, but after a while the dreams that were always a part of his being began to get the better of him. Though there were sheep and mountains and a tang of sage, there was no Jean la Jennette. At night the dog would squat down and wonder what had happened. He missed Jean la Jennette's brogue and affectionate cussing. "Zat dog" had become only a part of his dream. He looked up at the moon and did not understand. Even a dog can get homesick. Days dragged by and weeks went into months and Rex began to go down. One day the boss, Len Korney, stopped to notice.

"Say. Whatcha s'pose is the matter with that dog? He seems to have lost his pep, eh?"

"Him?" said the man Jim. "Nothin's the matter with him, only he's homesick. He'll get over that. He'll have to."

The time came at last when the old dog even lost interest in the sheep. All his time was spent in the corrals, sleeping and loitering with one eye open. When he was not with the sheep he was looking down the road watching—waiting for Jean la Jennette. And at last when Jean did not come to him, the old dog stood up and started for Jean la Jennette.

He remembered that road. To his own way of thinking and in his dog's mind all had gone well until he had come up that road; but since then there had been no Jean la Jennette. It took a long while, but the time came, at last, when he had whittled it all down to a sheep dog's understanding—that down that road, some place, he must find his master.

That is how he came to the railroad.

The train was at the siding, and the baggage car was open; also, the baggage man, now on his old run, was busy. The man did not see the dog leap into the car and go to his old place in the corner. The overland whizzed by and the train started; the baggage man went about his work. Presently he walked over to the corner of the car and stepped back. There was the dog.

The man knew the dog now. And he had full reason, because for months past there had been a hullabaloo raised over the lost Rex. The name Rex had rung in his ears until he was sick of it. And now here was the dog himself sitting as nonchalantly as a ghost. The trainman took out his pipe.

"Well, by gum! Can yuh beat it? If it ain't a dog-gone ghost. It's him, and it's him sure'n shooting. Hello Rex! Dog-gone if yuh ain't real at that. Well, by cracky!"

Bob Arnold was in Sacramento when he received a roundabout message from his attorney. The railroad had found Rex and was holding him for identification. Arnold hurried down and spotted him at once. But there was no explanation other than that the dog had been found on the train. How he got there no one could tell—that was the mystery. But it was not exactly a mystery to Bob Arnold. He patted old Rex on the head.

"They took you off the train, old fellow, didn't they? And so you just naturally came back and hopped on that train again, eh? Wanted to see Jean la Jennette, didn't you? Well, well; I know an old Bosco sheep-herder who is just about dead for his old dog too."

And so Jean la Jennette was. It was sheep-shearing time, and that made his grief all the greater. Besides, José Sacramento, Jean's rival, had brought down his dog and was lording the herding of the flocks, and that was an honor that had always belonged to Jean la Jennette. From his perch on the fence Jean was watching the performance and mourning over the amateurish effort. His own dog had been a champion, a king of all dogs, and a dog of dogs. He had a right to mourn. He did not notice the train trailing down the valley, nor the little knot of people that had stepped off at the station; neither did he see the streak of dust that was coming toward the pens. But he did see the tangle of fur and the cart wheel of bodies as the two dogs came together. Then out of it all came old Rex, lord of the pens, back to his own! A whoop went up from Jean la Jennette. The dog had leaped upon the packed backs and was trotting over to his master. He was met with open arms.

"Ou la la!" called the weeping sheepherder. "She's zat dog come back to hees good Jean la Jennette! Did I not say? *Ou lá la!* Never you beat zat dog!"

THE ONLY ONE OF HER KIND

MISS DOROTHY HALEY, of Juneau, Alaska, is said to be the only woman tourist agent in the United States. A native daughter of Alaska, the United States government selected her to interest prospective travelers in the scenic wonders of its own railroad. The government-owned road extends from Seward on the coast to Fairbanks in the interior, a distance of nearly four hundred miles of great scenic beauty.

In the interests of this Federal project Miss Haley and her mother visited all the tourist marts of this country to tell them the wonders of the Northland. Previous to her present appointment, Miss Haley was a newspaper reporter. Except for two years spent at the University of Washington, she has passed her entire life in Alaska, at Juneau, the capital. Her relatives were all pioneer Alaskans.

That Dog-gone Dog!

By James Edward Hungerford.

I'VE got a little mongrel dog,
That trails me ev'rywhere;
No matter where I chance to jog,
That dog-gone dog is there!
He took an awful hunch to me,
The worst yuh ever saw,
When from a trap, I set 'im free—
The which had broke his paw.

That rascal had been foolin' 'round
That trap—the nosey cuss!
An' he was rollin' on the ground
An' makin' heaps o' fuss;
He'd stuck his paw in there to steal
A shunk o' bobcat bait,
An' them there little jaws o' steel
Had done their work, first rate!

I got him free, an' toted him
Back home, upon my hoss,
An' sat that little broken limb,
An' since then—I'm his boss;
He trails me ev'rywhere I go,
He worships me, you bet.
That kind deed that I done, I know
He never will ferget.

An' then into more woe, he got,
One day up in the hills;
He fought a porcupine, which shot
His hide plumb full o' quills!
I picked 'em out o' him, an' he
Jest groveled at my feet,
An' since then, he would die fer me,
An' think it was a treat!

Whenever at the ranch we be,
A campin' by the trail,
That dog jest sets an' stares at me,
An' wags his scrubby tail,
An' in his eyes there is a look
That tells me, plain an' clear,
That he'll stick by me, hook er crook,
As long as he is here.

Triangle Z's All-brass Serenade

By

Cherry Wilson

Author of "All-in," etc.

SQUAWK! Screech! Crash! Jimmy Clark groaned. In the three weeks that had passed since the cowboys of Triangle Z had received the instruments for their brass band, he had suffered much—was still suffering. From the bunk house came a hideous bedlam of sound that would have put a pack of hyenas to shame. On the front veranda Jeff—Jimmy's lean, long-eared old hound—howled most dismally. Any unusual sound was enough to set Jeff howling, and lately there had been continual provocation. Louder, more piercing, rose the unmelodious outburst. Shattered nerves could bear no more. Jimmy Clark made resolutely for the bunk house.

"Boys," he said sternly, "this racket must stop!"

The astounded bandsmen glanced up from their glittering implements of torture in blank incredulity.

"You mean, Jimmy," gasped out "Wishful" Dixon unbelievingly, "thet we can't practice no more?"

"I do!" Long suffering made Clark firm. "Last night you stampeded that bunch of steers all rounded up and ready for market. You wasted to-day corralling them again. Why, this eternal cat's concert has got every animal on the place—includin' myself—on the prod!"

"Jimmy," protested "All-in" Lappin in a voice tremulous with self-pity, "if'n thet's your ultimaytum, the waste of wind an' time'll be plumb sinful. Fer three weeks we've tooted stiddy on "Ol' Black Joe," figgerin' to git so——"

"So we kin play right afore folks," interrupted Wishful, whose burning ambition was to make a musical début.

"An' now," went on All-in, "you'd put the kibosh to our aspirin's jist when we're a-gittin' the hang of——"

"You're not," stated Jimmy bluntly. "You're worse! To-night was the limit of earthly endurance."

"Wuss!" cried Wishful bitterly. "I'll tell you why we're wuss! Jist because when Dimples oughta be here a-beatin' his drum, he's a-beatin' it over to——" the youth broke off abashed. But Jimmy was quick to observe the break and the guilty look on every face present.

"Dad, where is Dimples?" he demanded of old "Dad" McKeen, whose sense of duty was proverbial.

There ensued a strained and prolonged silence.

"He's—he's courtin' grief!" blurted out Dad desperately.

"That's certain," admitted the boss of Triangle Z, "but in which particular way?"

"Jist what I said," insisted the conscientious old puncher, "he's courtin' grief."

"Dad means," elucidated All-in, suddenly voluble, "thet Dimples is a-makin' up to Dolores Mendoza, an' her fust name bein' Spanish and Mex fer sorrer, Dad allus calls her 'Grief.' Savvy?"

Jimmy did. And the news rendered him for the moment speechless. That Dimples McFee—a corpulent and impecunious cow hand—should aspire to the heart of the adorable Señorita Dolores of the Escondido Rancho, filled Clark with awe. Moreover, he suspected that her father, Don Luis Mendoza had already selected Joselito, his major-domo, as future son-in-law. No doubt the girl would be highly amused by Dimple's suit. But Joselito was young, unreasonably jealous, and mighty hot tempered. It would be awkward as the deuce, now that the round-up season was near, to have a top hand like Dimples put out of the running, or worse. The cowboy was, indeed, courting grief.

"How long has this been going on?" Clark asked gravely.

Dad scratched his head in deep cogitation. "Waal, I'd opine 'twuz ever since the dance what the Cactus Blossom Club give. This gal wuz thar with her dooenny, an' Dimples ain't ever looked the same since. He jist pecks at his vittles, dawdles at his work, an' rides to the Escondido nights. Once thar, he dangles round outside, hopin' to git a squint at the wimminfolks. I've hern, underhandedlike, as how this here Joselito is a-makin' war medicine, an' I tells Dimples. Howsumever, he beats it ag'in tonight an' takes his drum."

"For Pete's sake, why did he take his dru——" Jimmy broke off, spellbound, his eyes glued to the bunk-house door, or rather, on the apparition there—a chunky figure so mutilated, so woebegone, that only long acquaintanceship enabled him to recognize it as Dimples McFee.

Hatless was Dimples, and all but shirtless. His cheeks, once so smooth and pink, were scratched and streaked with red. On his forehead was a darkening lump of noticeable dimensions. In short, his whole ensemble suggested imminent disintegration. Hitched to his belt—by a miracle still intact—was a large brass shell, freshly and muchly dented, to which a few dejected tatters of sheepskin clung. It was this, rather than the human wreck, that caught the horrified gaze of Triangle Z.

"Jumpin' Jehosaphat!" shrieked Wishful Dixon tragically. "Busted!"

Clark was moved to faint pity. "A new head will repair the damage," was his thoughtless comment.

A homicidal glare from Dimples revealed his mistake.

"I refer to the drum, of course." Both Jimmy's expression and tone were unquestionably sympathetic. "But don't keep us in suspense. What happened?"

Somewhat placated, the miserable drummer sank down on a near-by bench and bowed his head in his hands.

"Everything," he said vaguely. "Everything happened what could happen."

"Derned if you don't look it," admitted Dad McKeen. "Derned if you don't look like sumpthin' the cat drug in!"

Furious, with spirit at least unbroken, Dimples turned savagely on his tormentor. "Don't twit me none, you ol' rhinoceros!" he blazed out. "Didn't you tell me the way to spark a Spanish gal wuz to sit under her winder an' play a tune? Them's your very words."

"They be," agreed Dad calmly. "An' dummed if I ain't a-standin' by 'em. When I wuz a young sprig down in Chihuahua, thet's shore the way they done."

"Well, I'm tellin' the world it don't

work none in Arizony," asserted the living testimonial to the fact, "fer I squatted under her winder an' played my drum fer up'ard of an hour."

Fortunately, Jimmy Clark's hysterical snicker was drowned by Dad's indignant retort.

"Why, you mutton-headed idjit! I sayed emphatic you wuz to play a tune an' sing!"

"I sung." In his abject embarrassment Dimples swung the wreck of his once noble drum to and fro between his knees.

"What?" Dad was skeptical. "Let's hear what you sung."

"Naw-w——"

"Dimples, we're wishful of befriendin' you," pleaded All-in, "an' we can't lessen we gits the innards of this thing. Sing it, so's we kin tell if 'twuz the singin' or drum thumpin' what lead to your present deplorable aspect."

Visibly affected by this sincere appeal, Dimples with many bashful and exceedingly painful squirms, capitulated.

"It's one I made up my own self—nuthin' squshy. Jist a song what'ud show a smart gal like her how a hombre's feelin'. I writ it, and I sung it—leastwise, the biggest part of it."

With this preface the battered cowboy got up and sang with doleful rhythm to an audience increasingly awe-stricken:

"Oh, a kiyote went a-courtin'
On a summer night,
The leetle stars wuz twinklin'
An' the moon wuz shinin' bright.

The moon wuz shinin' bright,
An' the kiyote says, says he,
An' sing as loud as the looniest loon
'I'll p'int my nose to thet silv'ry moon,
To my love on the lone pra'rie.'
Oo-ee-ee—yip-oo-ee
Oo-o-ee-e-oo-o——"

"Thet barkin's the chorus—they's six lines of it," Dimples interrupted himself in the midst of a highly realistic performance to remark. "I won't sing 'em all now, but I shore did over thar. 'Twuz right on thet last 'oo-o' thet what happened transpired. Bang! A flock of bricks went through my drum, an' every danged greaser on the Escondido wuz a-swarmin' over me. Thet onery Mex, Joselito, led the battle, the details on which I'm plumb hazy, bein's I was in the midst of the conflict. Thet I'm here to tell the tale ain't no fault at all of Dad's——"

Dad's lean face reddened with swift wrath. "Lay off-a me!" he shrilled. "How in Tophet wuz I to 'spicion you'd be plagued fool enough to go serenadin' a gal with a drum? Reckon you woke up the hull ranch, an' I ain't blamin' 'em a bit fer runnin'——"

"Yeah, they run me off!" stormed the cowboy defiantly. "But I told 'em I'd be back to-morrer night. An' I shore will! I'll git my drum fixed in the mornin', an' I'll sashay over thar, an' nobody'll stop me playin', lessen I see——"

"Listen!" entreated Wisful Dixon, his earnest face aflame. "I got a whoppin' big idee! We'll go with you, Dimples. We'll serenade your gal with the hull band. We'll play her 'Ol' Black Joe!' Thet Escondido outfit won't dast to touch the bunch of us. Of course we won't hev the drum to-night, but we kin practice our other pieces fer hours yit."

"We can't!" reminded All-in, turning on Jimmy two pale-blue eyes misty with reproach, and Wishful's face fell.

Now of all Clark's senses, the one of humor was strongest. The thought of this tuneless bunch serenading Dolores Mendoza with a brass band was irresistible. According to his fun-loving nature it would be criminal to interfere with what had all the hilarious possibilties of a three-ring circus.

"Boys," and here Jimmy made the mistake he was to regret through ten of the most agonizing moments of his life, "an affair of the heart on this man's ranch is seldom, if ever. Therefore I am moved to reconsider. When I get

old, like Dad here, I don't want it said that I denied any man his chance. Hop to it!"

As Clark swung out of the room into the moonlight, the band broke out afresh. Jeff, at his master's heels, added his voice to the terrible clamor. But, strangely, Jimmy heard neither sound that for weeks past had set his teeth on edge. This talk of señoritas and moonlit casements had revived a memory—the memory of Jacquita.

The Spanish girl had been one of his schoolmates at San Juan. And one night—just such a night of white, velvety moonlight as this—he had serenaded her. Jimmy had considered it merely a romantic whim—then. The very next day came word of his father's collapse, and he had hastened home to Triangle Z to find the whole responsibility of the ranch resting on his young shoulders. Thus were school ties broken, and he lost track of Jacquita.

This was as long as Jimmy Clark could remain pensive. Ere he reached the house he was chuckling over the figure Dimples must have cut, pounding his drum in the garden of Don Luis and singing that idiotic song. To-morrow the aristocratic old don would have a taste of what he had been forced to endure. Still it was risky business—given Joselito's fiery nature and Triangle Z's relish for a scrap. Perhaps it would be well if he went over to Escondido and was on hand when the band arrived. He'd see the fun and smooth things over with the don. Yes, he'd call on the Señorita Mendoza, and——

By George! Why not do a little serenading himself? It would be a lark. He could time his visit a trifle ahead of his cowboys, play a tune on his mandolin, and be laughing with the Mendozas over his foolish performance when the big show started.

With keenest anticipation Jimmy finally betook himself to bed to dream of Spanish maidens.

Don Luis Mendoza—a courtly, portly, and silver-haired old Spaniard—was troubled not a little by the chastisement Dimples McFee had received at the hands of his vaqueros. Hence the glance he bent upon his daughter—as they, together with her charming duenna, Donna Anna, breakfasted this sunshiny morn—was severe for all its paternal pride.

"My dear," he said in Spanish, studying her closely, "the affair of last night is most awkward. I cannot afford to quarrel with my esteemed neighbor, Señor Clark. Therefore I regret that Joselito found it necessary to deal roughly with one of his men. You have, I trust, not stooped to coquet with this Dimples McFee, who is but a peon in his own country?"

The dark eyes of Dolores sparkled roguishly. She was fully aware of the suspense with which the don awaited her reply.

"My dear," she mimicked impishly, "nobody loves a fat man. I ask you in all candor—is not this Dimples fat?"

Don Luis heaved a sigh of marked relief, but the duenna frowned. "I dislike frivolity in a girl so young," she chided gently. "Truly this cowboy is no match for a Mendoza, but need we speak of his—girth? After all he impressed me as an amiable fellow."

Don Luis nodded hearty approval. Was Donna Anna not the perfect guardian? Young enough to be companionable to his motherless child, the widowed duenna yet possessed rare wisdom. What a picture they made—the fresh, sweet bud, the full-blown rose.

"My lover," Dolores was musing dreamily, "must be slim, like the palo verde; gallant, and—oh, most brave!"

Bueno! thought the don. Then it was Joselito whom she had in mind. That was as he wished it.

But a moment later he was not so sure when, younger by years in spirit, he strolled into the patio just as a reckless rider lifted his horse to a spectacu-

lar stop, slid from the saddle, and came forward swinging his rawhide quirt. Struck anew by the grace and dash of his favorite, Don Luis repeated in substance his daughter's words.

"It is plain she cares nothing for this gringo," he declared happily, "since the one she loves must be slender, gallant, and brave."

To his intense surprise Joselito displayed wild agitation. "Señor!" was his despairing cry—for he was much too modest to ascribe these superior attributes to himself—"you have make the big mistake. Love is without vision. In this gringo she but beholds these very virtues. Moreover, she denied it not outright."

Years settled back on the don's shoulders. "You are right, my son," he answered wearily. "These are strange times. No longer do daughters accord their parents the filial respect of old. Dispose of this unworthy suitor as seems best. Only let not the briefest hair of his head be harmed. It is enough that he howls no more in the grounds at night." Don Luis was turning away when a fresh thought struck him.

"Remember," he charged solemnly, "this must be done with the utmost silence. There comes to the hacienda tonight a cherished friend of the señorita, and the renowned hospitality of the house of Mendoza must not be violated by any indecorous fiasco."

In high glee at having been given free rein in the disposal of his rival, the major-domo set out in search of two vaqueros, whom, for excellent reasons, he had well under his thumb. Already he had decided the fate of Dimples. In the study of Don Luis was a painting, one that had held Joselito fascinated for hours together. "Mazeppa," was its name. And it pictured a stark, human form chained to the back of a prostrate stallion, both slowly dying from desert heat and thirst. On the young Spaniard it had made a profound impression. Just so would he bind Dimples to his horse. True he would be hampered somewhat by the don's injunction to do him no bodily harm. Even so it would be a revenge most beautiful.

Having come upon the pair he sought, taking a siesta in the shade of the walled corral when they were supposedly repairing a fence five miles distant, Joselito, without one word of reproof, dropped down beside them, lit a cigarette, and came at once to the point.

"Last night a gringo of too much freshness howled like a lobo beneath the señorita's window. The pummeling we gave him was not sufficient, since he boldly announces his return. To-night we must make his punishment complete. Attend!"

Here Joselito flung the cigarette aside, bent close to the swarthy faces of his conferees, and communicated his dark and diabolical plot, at last charging both with certain fiendish instruction.

"Now," he concluded, rising, "let there be not the noise of a pin fall. There will be a guest at the casa. Also, should the señorita hear the fuss, she might investigate. Most certainly then will she put the halt. Even might she pity this ingrate and fancy it to be the flutterings of love. Once have I laid this Dimples low, I will have the clean sail. So! Are my commands quite clear!"

Four rows of white teeth flashed in a comprehending grin.

"Si, señor!"

So the trap was laid.

And a few hours later, all unsuspecting of the trap—baited now with witching moonlight, exotic scents, and the intangible allure of the old-world atmosphere that hung over Escondido Rancho—Jimmy Clark hid his horse in the chaparral near the drive, and headed for the garden. He was in high spirits. Under his arm was his mandolin, and behind, though he knew it not, was Jeff. For the old hound had followed from

Triangle Z at a discreet distance, one he was careful even now to maintain. Moonlight filtering in silvery rays through the shrubbery revealed the darkened windows of the women's wing and a low bench beneath.

Seated there, Jimmy succumbed at once to the night and setting. It was not of the band, the don, nor of Dolores, that he thought, but of Jacquita—her dark, piquant face, her raven hair, her laugh, musical, thrilling—like none other in the universe. He remained motionless, dreaming, till sounds of merriment within the brilliantly lighted pile disturbed his reverie. Curiously, then, all zest for the adventure was gone.

In some impatience to have his stunt over, he lifted his mandolin and struck a preliminary chord. To save his soul from perdition, Jimmy could not have struck another, for horror froze his fingers to the strings.

With and above his melody had broken forth a heartbreaking wail, alarmingly penetrating, unutterably sad. Behind him, silhouetted against a bush, with nose directed toward the man in the moon, old Jeff was sobbing out his heart in dolorous, canine song.

Jimmy was in desperation. Any moment some one might appear to quell the uproar, might discover himself—a respectable and influential cattleman—under a girl's window with a mandolin and a howling dog. It was unthinkable!

Muttering a heartfelt curse, he jumped over the bench, seizing Jeff by the long hair with some insane notion of strangling him outright.

"Shut up!" he hissed, shaking the hound savagely. "Darn you, let up! Get home—or I'll skin you alive!"

His efforts but increased Jeffs' vocal output.

Deep in the foliage a vaquera whispered hoarsely: "Eet ees the gringo. Again he make the howl."

"Lunatico!" replied the other tensely. "Haf I not ears also? Thees minute haf I hees horse make fast in the juniper grove. Slip around those bush and encircle heem with your rope. From thees side I will do likewise. Onlee forget not the silence."

Never dreaming of the devilish intent the shrubbery concealed, Jimmy was trying persuasion where threat had failed.

"Jeff; good old Jeff," he pleaded. "Come on ho——"

His entreaty was rudely checked. Lightning-swift a riata hissed about his shoulders, tautening with a jerk that sent him to earth. As swiftly another caught his feet on the rebound. Before he could decide whether it was an earthquake or cyclone that had hit him, a dark face bent over and thick fingers forced a gag between his teeth.

Tied up like a calf for branding, powerless to protest, he was lifted in strong arms and borne feet foremost through the shadows. Jeff, silenced at last, trotted at Jimmy's side, evidently sharing none of his master's natural fears as to what was to happen, what it was all about. As a matter of course, Jimmy assumed his abductors to be the don's men. More he could not fathom.

"Thees ees most strange," commented the villain at his head. "I would haf sworn by all the saints thees Dimples weighed a good feefty pound more."

"Fool!" derided the other. "Does eet not bear out my contention—that you are a judge most poor of beef on the hoof?"

Dimples! Then they had mistaken him for his cowboy. Recalling the treatment Dimples had received here the night before, Jimmy suffered a qualm of trepidation. He writhed and struggled as ineffectually as an angry infant, till they suddenly stopped in the denser gloom of some trees, where, to Clark's amazement, his own horse was standing.

Unceremoniously the businesslike pair dumped him face downward across his saddle—exactly as one would adjust a bag of oats—and tied him there in that

hopelessly secure fashion peculiar to vaqueros. When this was done to their entire satisfaction, one of the duò held up Jimmy's mandolin, which he had thoughtfully retrieved.

"I haf here hees devil box," said the thoughtful one. "Fasten eet to hees horn most tightly that all may know, we of Escondido rob heem of eet not."

This artistic touch completed, a vaquero lifted his quirt to speed the parting guest. Jimmy gamely braced himself for the shock. Down came the lash. Wildly Clark's horse leaped ahead. And, simultaneously:

S-slam! B-bang! The stillness of night was sundered by a deafening medley of discords which only by a remarkable instance of detection could be identified as "Old Black Joe."

Triangle Z's all-brass band had arrived!

Jimmy, jarred breathless by the horse's maddened lunge, had a confused impression of shouts, storming footsteps, all merging with the blare of trumpet and beat of drum. The garden of Don Luis was in tumult.

Doors and windows were flung wide, emitting a flood of glaring light and excited humanity. In the center of both, Triangle Z was playing like mad.

The don, literally beside himself at this wanton outrage to the peace and dignity of his home, danced up and down before Dimples McFee, sizzling like a highly charged bottle of pop. Behind her inarticulate father was Dolores, but a whit less excited, together with Donna Anna, and yet another slight figure in shimmering white—the señorita's guest.

Dimples, temporarily paralyzed by the appearance of the women, ceased beating his drum on its brand-new head. He could only stare dumbly, arms upraised, drumsticks rigidly extended, while his loyal comrades did their glorious best without him.

"Thump it!" shrieked Dad, furious at this desertion now that the girl was actually on hand. "By dern, be we a-goin' to serenade, or bein't we? Thump it, an' sing 'bouten thet kiyote!"

Dimples, making a heroic effort, rolled up his dazed eyes and sang feebly:

"A—a kiyote wen——"

"Son of a mangy sheep!"

Don Luis had at last found his voice, one so terrible that it silenced band and singer alike.

"This is the insult supreme. One night you howl like a beast. But is this sufficient? No! To-night you return with more of your kind. Making the noise—the so monstrous noise! Most terrible of noise! Worse than ten thousand beasts! So! A Mendoza can bear no more. My patience is exhaust! Carlos! Sancho! Pedr——"

"Caramba!"

This startling cry, breaking into the don's frenzied summoning of his peons, was made by Joselito who, having just run up and seeing Dimples present, afoot and fetterless, when but a scant five minutes before he had seen, in compliance with his orders, a man borne from the garden, all but swooned. However, realization of the grave consequences attendant upon such a serious blunder, made his recovery quick. His glittering eyes, darting through the throng, speedily picked out the two vaqueros to whom his orders were given.

"Imbeciles!" he screamed, gesticulating wildly. "What mad thing have you done? Whom did you carry from the garden?"

"Quien sabe?" shrugged the imperturbable pair. *"Ciertamente,* eet ees the one who howl."

With a groan the major-domo staggered back, to be caught by Don Luis, now shocked into forgetfulness of personal insult.

"Joselito, what does this mean? Speak!"

Ghastly was the youth, even in that uncertain light. "Ah," was his bitter cry, "I am of men most miserable. Be-

cause I sought to shame, to humiliate the gringo—to return him to his friends that they might see his shame. It was to be a revenge exquisite—poetic. But these nitwits—it is the wrong man they lash to the horse!"

Don Luis was gripped by a terrible premonition. His two hands shot out, and each seized a startled vaquero.

"Quick!" he thundered, while Triangle Z looked on in stark amazement. "Get this man and bring him to me. Whoever he is—however far the chase may take—bring him here! Else will your worthless hulks be quartered and boiled in——"

The frightened culprits fled.

Jimmy's one emotion, as his horse dashed away with him, impotent to check or direct its course, was that of intense relief. His position was highly uncomfortable, but not more so than the situation from which the Mexicans had yanked him. The animal would bear him straight to Triangle Z, and once there he would somehow free himself and none be the wiser. Then, suddenly, it dawned on him that he, too, was traveling toward that babble of awful sound.

His horse, either recognizing the mangled tune, or scenting the horses from the home corral, was, leisurely, but indubitably, making tracks for the garden with frequent whinnies of joy. Clark's predicament could have been worse, for Jeff was too worried now to howl. Well did the old dog know that no human rode that way from choice. But Jimmy was not grateful for small favors. Like many another practical joker, he had a positive horror of being made ridiculous himself.

By an all but superhuman effort he spat out the gag. He whoaed, he fervently swore, but the horse was of the same mind still. If only there was not that cursed mandolin dangling from the horn just above his right ear!

Then his heart gave a mighty thump of hope. Out of the night two dark forms loomed and seized his bridle. Speedily hope died. For they were leading him on toward the garden, now ominously still.

"Untie me, you devils!" he shrieked. "Let me go!"

"Eet ees the order," vouchsafed one custodian firmly, "that we breeng you to Don Luis."

They were near now—very near. By twisting his head at a painful angle, Jimmy could see the blur of faces turned his way, see the light gowns of the women.

Clammy drops dripped from Jimmy's suspended brow. He had caught a trill of laughter—musical, thrilling, like none other in the universe!

"A hundred apiece, to undo my hands and turn me loose!" was his desperate cry. "One hundred bucks—and no questions asked!"

Again the stolid response: "Eet ees the order!"

Rather would Jimmy die now than be lead into that area of light, but the choice was not his. Inexorably, he was dragged through the throng, now dumb with consternation, to Don Luis Mendoza. Like a knell to Clark's vanity was that concerted gasp of recognition.

Triangle Z was too astounded to see their employer in such a plight to render first aid, thereby unconsciously prolonging Jimmy's agony.

"Holy Mackerel!" exclaimed Wishful Dixon, stooping to the level of Clark's eyes. "Whatcha doin' there, Jimmy?"

It was the last straw.

"Doin'?" snapped out his boss, in his murderous fury lapsing into the phraseology of his pre-school days. "Doin'? I'm courtin' grief!"

Dad McKeen took him literally, and was all befuddled.

"Waal, allowin' you be, Jimmy," he asked querulously, "why in Tophet did you string yourself up thet way?"

As Jimmy was framing an adequate

reply, a white-clad form pushed through the cowboys to his side.

"Jeemy!" softly cried a well-remembered musical voice, vibrant with pity—or mirth.

Jaquita!

Shame tied Jimmy's tongue. Shame that by some cruel quirk of fate Jaquita, evidently a household guest of the Mendozas, was here to see his disgrace. What could he say and still conceal the humiliating truth? He must fabricate! A holdup? But, no—then, what?

Mercifully Don Luis spared him the trouble. The Spaniard's contrition was pitiable. So continuous, so abject his apologies, Jimmy could not get a word in edgewise.

"Señor Jeemy!" moaned the don, wringing his hands, while Triangle Z untied Jimmy and restored him to his natural equilibrium. "Never can you the insult forgive. No! Not if I beg one—ten thousand—pardons! Yet it was but the result of too much zeal on the part of Joselito. How he can make the bad mistake—how he can confuse the great Señor Clark with one of his lowly hirelings—I cannot comprehend. It is to weep. Not this way does a Mendoza treat his guests!"

"Ah," he lamented, without even a pause for breath, "little did I think this night, when I a messenger dispatched to the house of Señor Clark humbly begging his society for an evening of exquisite discourse, that he should such a reception obtain. It was to be an occasion most seraphic—to hold reunion with this most beauteous friend of my daughter and old schoolmate of his. Señor Clark, I beg, I beseech, I entreat, that you will look over——"

Here Jimmy interrupted a flow of words that bid fair to last forever. With physical freedom and the don's speech, his old nonchalance had returned. It seemed he had an alibi, one he little deserved, for he had been invited here tonight to meet Jacquita. The invitation must have reached Triangle Z after he had left. He might yet save his face.

"Don Luis," he said slowly, as one who strives to be just, "it *was* pretty rough treatment to accord the trusting guest. But what's a little thing like this among friends? I will overlook this grave breach of etiquette, if you will be equally magnanimous and completely forgive my impetuous friend, Dimples McFee."

Not until then had the don shown real anguish. This proposition, so gracious, so noble, so—so impossible!

"But consider!" he wailed, his fine old eyes suffused. "This is most terrible—most hard! How can I present this lowly earth worm, who woos with the howl and screech, the hand of my daughter. Yet have I less of——"

"Whadda you mean—your daughter?"

Dimples, who had borne abuse stoically, was goaded into speech by the sudden fear that Don Luis was about to deliver Dolores into his keeping forever.

A thunderbolt would have had less effect.

Dolores gasped, clinging to Joselito in a way that proved the don's selection was hers also.

"Waal, by dern!" Old Dad was again flabbergasted. "Whadda you mean—agittin' us to incriminate ourselves this a way, if'n you wuzn't plumb bugs bouten this here gal?"

In excessive shyness Dimples dug the toe of his boot in the don's grassy turf. "I—I never said 'twuz her," he faltered with awkward softness. "I—I wuz kinder shinin' up to—you see, I wuz a-serenadin' Donna Annie."

There followed a stunned, awe-stricken silence, then Don Luis broke the suspense. He started to laugh—a low, muffled rumble that seemed to rise from the depths and sweep over him. He laughed till he wept, and still weeping, laughed—guffaws of joy that brought tears of purest mirth.

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When he had, by slow degrees, attained calmness, the group had reformed. On the fatal bench Jimmy and Jacquita were deep in animated reminiscence of other days, with the old hound an interested auditor. Dimples was perilously near Donna Anna, and the deunna's soft eyes were working overtime. In the most shadowed spot, absorbed in their own two selves, was Dolores and her Joselito.

Most lonely, most disconsolate appeared Triangle Z's all-brass band, with the sole exception of its drummer. And of all the disconsolate, none was more so than Wishful Dixon. Their first and only audience, and their one tune still unfinished!

Don Luis sensed their gloom and, because he was the very soul of hospitality, he dried his eyes and said:

"Señores, this night has witnessed many distressing mistakes, the greatest of which was mine. Your music is of music most heavenly. Now I have just seen that which enables me to predict there will shortly be a fiesta at Escondido to celebrate the betrothal of the Señorita Mendoza and my major-domo. I would, señores, deem it a favor most gracious, if you would attend in a body and play for us the so splendid music."

Wishful's heart sang for joy.

"Don," he accepted ecstatically, "we'll be there with bells on!"

Jimmy Clark heard—and shuddered.

TRAPPERS RESENT MARTEN LAW

THE authorities in the Yukon Territory some time ago established a closed season for marten. From the present time until November 15, 1927, the trapping of marten is forbidden. The Alaskan authorities have put in effect a similar law, and an arrangement has been made with British Columbia to establish a like closure. It is said that these protective measures were made imperative by the smaller catch made each year of these beautiful little creatures. The authorities claim they were concerned only to prevent the extinction of the marten.

From Fort Yukon came the following protest, signed by twenty trappers:

"The law prohibiting the killing of marten is considered by us to be unjust, and will work hardship on the trapper, both Indian and white, and also on the trader in the northern section of the Yukon Territory.

"Marten are at present more plentiful than any fur-bearing animal. Rats have disappeared entirely, due in large part to the small number of trappers, and also to the length of the closed season. Of lynx there are none; wolves few; mink, very scarce; fox, few, and beaver, fairly plentiful in one section.

"Should this law be enforced, it will cause suffering and hardship among the residents of Rampart House and Old Crow, every one of whom makes his or her living by the taking of furs. The Indians depend almost entirely on getting their provisions and equipment from the traders on credit. Therefore, by prohibiting the taking of the only fur that is plentiful, the Indian is unable to meet his obligations, and consequently, his credit being cut off, he will become a charge on the government.

"It seems very unjust in the case of white trappers to impose a heavy license fee and then prohibit them from taking the furs from the sale of which they are enabled to pay these fees.

"It would appear that the fur laws cover too wide a territory. What is, perhaps, an excellent law for the territory in the vicinity of Whitehorse, does not always apply north of the arctic circle, and vice versa."

In the Wrong Pasture

[A SHORTY McKAY STORY]

By

Ray Humphreys

Author of
"Ridin' with Bells On," etc.

THE sheriff of Monte Vista hung up the receiver on his telephone and turned to his dozing deputy, "Shorty" McKay.

"Shorty," said Sheriff Joe Cook, "yuh beat it down quick to McFadden's hotel. He's just called up to say that thar's a couple of jaspers in thar tryin' ter bog down one o' his Eastern guests with a line o' pi'zen chin music—yuh git down thar an' reason it out with 'em!"

The deputy arose and stretched and stifled a great yawn. Then he hitched his cartridge belt around, so that the fancy holster set more nearly in front, and ambled out.

"Beats all," commented the sheriff, as Shorty swung into saddle and galloped off down Monte's main thoroughfare, "how flumdaddled crooked the world is gittin'—everybody tryin' to do everybody else—card sharks and pool sharps, an' real-estate slickers and oil fakers, an' ordinary thieves an' book agents."

Meanwhile Shorty had entered McFadden's hotel.

The proprietor, "Pop" McFadden, met him at the threshold, a warning finger to his lips, and he motioned Shorty to one side, excitement dancing in his faded blue eyes.

"See them two fellers over thar buzzin' that ol' gent with the side whiskers?" asked Pop anxiously. "Waal, he's from N'Yark, the ol' geezer, and them two roughnecks breezes in hyar this mawnin' an' start chinin' him about a mine they've discovered an' I managed to overhear enough of it to figger thar's a nigger in the woodpile."

"Sure enough?" asked Shorty, and he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and took a closer look. The old gentleman was obviously a stranger in Monte Vista. He wore spats, for one thing. Shorty passed on hastily to the other two and he speedily classified them as Westerners, pure an' simple—perhaps not so simple, as they seemed to have the old fellow all worked up over what they were telling him so confidentially.

Shorty took out a handkerchief and rubbed it hastily across his deputy's badge. Then he stepped forward.

"We gotta cool half million thar, ef we kin foller the lode," one was saying as Shorty walked up. "But we gotta go keerful an' secretlike ef we want to git very——"

The man stopped as Shorty halted before him.

"Waal?" asked the second of the pair, looking up at Shorty, who had stopped, with his hands on his hips and his big Stetson pushed well back off his forehead, "What's the matter?"

"I dunno," answered Shorty truthfully. "But I aims to find out pronto. My label is Shorty McKay, an' I'm deputy sheriff in these parts, an' yuh can——"

"Good gracious!" interposed the old gentleman from New York, dropping his eyeglasses in a panic. "Let's have no shooting here—let's have no bloodshed——"

"Thar won't be," said Shorty, dropping his hand to his holster, "but I asked a question, an' I want——"

"My name is 'Slim' Martin," said the first stranger.

"Mine's Louie Long," gasped out the second.

"I'm Benjamin Brewster," said the New Yorker, "but let us have no trouble here, officer—we're lawful citizens."

Shorty pulled up a chair. "What's all this whisperin' an' soft peddlin' goin' on here is what I wants to know?"

The three men exchanged significant glances. There was a moment's silence, then the old gentleman spoke.

"If we don't care to reveal that——" he began.

"Then it's the cooler for all of yuh," announced Shorty briskly, "an' on our way down thar don't let me fergit to remember to buy some rat pi'zen at Meek's grocery, as them rats are playin' hob with our jail."

"We might tell him," suggested the old gentleman, but he got no satisfaction from the other two conspirators. They seemed mesmerized by Shorty's shining badge.

"Listen," said the old gentleman, bending toward Shorty, "these gentlemen here have discovered a very valuable mining property, and I have come out here to help straighten things out, and you——"

"Thought so!" said Shorty. "They've salted down an old drift an' are workin' yuh fer a sucker——"

The three men gasped at that, but the old gentleman began to smile. He drew a letter from his pocket and extended it to Shorty.

"I grubstaked these boys a year ago," the old man explained, "and they're not tryin' to fleece me at all, sir—read that letter!"

Shorty opened the letter. He read:

DEAR MR. BREWSTER: This is to inform you that we've had the gold tested in Alamosa, and it runs a dollar a pound of ore, which is extremely high value. We have about twenty thousand dollars of it in sight, but we have driven through to our property's limit and find that the lode goes on up the hill into an old deserted sheep ranch. We must get this ranch before the news of our find becomes known. We understand we can get the ranch for fifteen thousand dollars cash money.

The letter then went on to urge that Brewster come to Monte Vista at once so that some deal could be made to acquire the sheep ranch before the owner of it "got wise."

Shorty folded the letter and handed it back. "My apologies," he said. "I see I'm in the wrong pasture. Waal, good luck to yuh an' good-by!"

He rose to go, casting a flinty glare at old Pop McFadden, who had fanned him down to the hotel on a wild-goose chase.

"Wait a minute, deputy," cried the New Yorker. "We'll have to have your promise to keep this matter absolutely mum—you can see how a word would ruin our chances of getting this other property without paying an exorbitant price for it, and——" The old gentleman lowered his voice. "We have other difficulties—we can't raise the fifteen thousand dollars necessary to buy that property at its present price. I've got five thousand dollars of it, but these boys have nothing——"

"Yuh got that ore in yuhr mine," reminded Shorty.

"Yes—but that stays there until we get our additional property; once we start moving out ore, our secret is gone."

Shorty saw the logic in that. He

glanced around at the three worried faces.

"Possibly," said the old gentleman, "thar might be some one in this town who would put up the other ten thousand for a one-fourth share in the mine —maybe you——"

Shorty laughed quietly. "I ain't got ten dollars, let alone ten thousand," he remarked. "I'm tryin' to buy a piece o' ranch land myself, but I lack five hundred o' havin' even that paid up yit."

"Perhaps you could suggest some one who would be interested," said the old gentleman. "Possibly this hotel man—he's been mighty concerned with what we've been talking about."

Shorty nodded. "He sure has; he thought yuh was gettin' trimmed, which would give the hotel a bad name, so he called me down. But he ain't got ten thousand dollars in anything but curiosity."

One of the hard-looking gentlemen then spoke up. "Reckon we would be able to pay the deputy here a commission ef he could find us the right guy who had the ten thousand bucks," he suggested, looking at Brewster. "We gotta close that deal to-morrow, or it's all off. I paid one hundred dollars for that option, an' she expires at noon!"

Brewster rubbed his hands together thoughtfully.

"You need five hundred dollars to finish paying up on your ranch," he said to Shorty. "Well, we'll give you that much if you can find a man who'll go in with us—of course we'll show him that we have the goods before we do business."

Shorty scratched his head. "Perfect!" he said, his face lighting up. "I'd like to earn that commish, gents. But first, afore I go blaaing to my friends, I'd like to size up your mine—I ain't no miner, but I kin tell purty well."

The two hard boils held their answer until Brewster nodded at Shorty.

"That's fair enough," he said. "All we ask is that you promise not to tell anybody where our mine is!"

"Hope to die!" said Shorty, elevating his hand.

Ten minutes later a cavalcade clattered out of Monte and took the Gopher Hills road. The old gentleman bounced in his saddle like a cork, but grimly held on, while Shorty and the other two held their horses down for the old man's sake. Two hours later they entered a rough ravine, in the heart of the Gopher Hills country, which was burrowed out with all sorts of old tunnels, shafts, drifts, and prospect holes, done and abandoned during the boom days of a decade before. There was no denying, however, that much gold still remained in the hills, and with modern methods of smeltering low-grade stuff that was not worth handling ten years before, might now be profitable. The two prospectors led the way up the ravine, almost to its head, and there dismounted. They motioned to Brewster and Shorty to dismount. Ahead of them loomed the black mouth of a tunnel, freshly timbered, and a fair-sized dump of sparkling clean granite showed that recent work had been done on the claim. All this Shorty took in at a glance.

Then they entered the tunnel. Water seeped through the ceiling rock at places, and at other places, where there had been soft dirt and cave-ins, the tunnel had been timbered. A lot of loose ore was stacked in the far end, and when the strangers clicked on their flash lights Shorty saw a vein of glistening, glittering rock that sparkled and scintillated in the light.

"At least a dollar a pound!" said one of the prospectors proudly, and Shorty saw that this could not be "salted" or imported stuff placed there to fool the unwary. It was right in the mine wall. Old Brewster made strange sounds in his throat as he saw it, and clasped his hands together.

"That's the article!" He choked with

emotion. "Rich—we'll all be rich outta this—rich—rich——"

They went back to the mouth of the tunnel, Shorty stopping now and then to inspect jutting veins of ore. At the mouth of the mine, in the bright Colorado sunshine that now seemed so mercilessly glaring and hot, after the dark coolness of the mine, the party stopped while one of the prospectors pointed up the ravine.

"See that ol' fence thar?" he asked. "Waal, that mark's our boundary. Beyond that is that old sheep ranch—about three hundred and twenty acres o' hill an' dell—for which the owner wants fifteen thousand dollars. You noticed that vein sneaked right back into that property? We've gone as far as we can with the tunnel without trespassing—we'll climb up on top!"

They climbed. At the fence they looked over into a desolate, hilly ranch, with old adobe houses crumbling in the weather, and corrals with rotting pine poles. The houses were windowless, the roof of one had caved in. Dirt roofs, which let in the seeping rain for days after the storm was over, graced the other shacks. It was a forbidding sight.

"Fifteen thousand for that?" asked Brewster. "Why, it's not worth fifteen cents, I'd say!"

The prospectors chuckled wisely. "Not on the surface," they admitted, "but we know what's beneath—we'll give this ol' sheep-herder fifteen thousand dollars and still come out ahead—eh, deputy?"

Shorty swallowed hard. He was seeing and hearing more than an ordinary deputy heard in a blue moon.

"Sure thing!" he exclaimed. "I'd say buy! That ore looks mighty good, an' ef yuh gotta have this place to git to the ore, thar ain't no question but what this sheep pasture is worth anything the owner asks!"

"You git us the man with the ready money," said Brewster to Shorty, "an' you'll make some money outten it yerself—five hundred dollars ain't to be sneezed at, son! Money like that ain't to be sneezed at!"

The party returned to Monte Vista in high spirits. On the way home the final arrangements were made and Shorty admitted that he knew somebody who would be breakin' a neck to get in on such a good thing. When they reached Monte Vista Shorty demanded that he be paid his commission pronto, and when objections came from the prospectors, he met them by saying that he would return the money if he didn't produce the man with the ten thousand dollars to invest. Old Brewster was for giving Shorty the commission anyway, and since it was Brewster's money, the other two could not hold out against it. They went to the bank, and there Brewster changed a traveler's check and paid over five one hundred dollar bills to the flush-faced Shorty.

Then, excusing himself for a moment, Shorty dropped out of the bank, saying that he was going to see if his prospect was in, and if he was he'd be right back to bring the three up to meet him. In ten minutes Shorty was back at the bank, his face wreathed in smiles. He beckoned to the others and led them outside.

"I ain't said nuthin' to him yit," explained Shorty, "but the feller I have in mind to put up the ten thousand is my boss, Sheriff Cook! He's got the money ef we can convince him the thing is good—come on!"

They found Sheriff Cook in his office. He looked up as Shorty ushered the guests in, with great gusto, and when Shorty had explained the proposition, in glowing terms, old Sheriff Cook leaned forward excitedly.

"I've said for ten years thar was millions in Gopher Hills," remarked he, slapping his thigh, "an' I reckon yuh fellers have hit it rich, but I don't like the idea o' paying so much for that ad-

joining property. No, sir. It shouldn't be worth half that much."

Shorty intervened. Shorty had seen the lay of the land, and his tongue wagged at a great rate now that he explained it all over again. If the rich, dollar-a-pound vein was to be followed up, as it must be, in order to fully develop the mine, then the tunnel must be bored on into the mountain, under the sheep ranch.

"They could trespass," said Shorty, "but as soon as they began shippin' they'd have visitors, an' it wouldn't be no time until it would be found out that they were off their claim, an' Colorado laws pervide that that kind o' trickery——"

Sheriff Cook raised a mighty hand. "Laws, I ain't advocatin' crookedness!" he bellowed. "Don't git me wrong. Who owns this ding-busted ol' sheep ranch?"

"A crazy sheep-herder," spoke up one of the prospectors.

"Mebbe he's got a sneakin' hunch thar's gold on his place," said Sheriff Cook. "An' that's why he's askin' such a big price. Waal——"

Old Man Brewster was a born orator. For twenty minutes then he talked gold to Sheriff Cook, and he dragged out cards and letters from his pockets to prove that he was somebody in New York. He had an honest face, anyway. And Shorty, who had been to the mine himself, seconded everything that the others said. At the end of an hour the sheriff was convinced. He sat back in his chair, wiped the perspiration from his face, and beamed on Shorty, Brewster, and the two miners. He stuck his thumbs in his vest and chuckled.

"Ready money talks!" he said jovially. "An' I've got it! I understand that yuh gents are payin' Shorty, my deputy, a commission on this deal. That takes care o' him. Now, here's my point; I'll put up the ten thousand smacks, but I gits a half interest in the diggings—not a fourth, but a half, yuh get me? Yuh three can divvy up the other half between yuh. I'm sold on the idear with them provisos, an' since I reckon I'm the only hombre with ten thousand cash in this county, I reckon it'll pay yuh to take me up!"

The proposition wasn't received well. Brewster and his two miners retired to a far corner and talked it over carefully, and finally motioned Shorty over to them.

"I know my boss," Shorty whispered. "He won't make another offer. Better take it, I'd say."

They came back, then, mollified, and Brewster announced that the sheriff would be given a one-half interest in the mine for his ten thousand dollars. He asked for pen and paper and thereupon drew up a contract to that effect, which all except Shorty signed. The sheriff produced his fat check book and scrawled out a check, payable to Brewster.

"I'll take that," said Shorty, and he plucked the check from the sheriff's hand.

Then, with an elaborate bow, he presented the check to Brewster, who took it with trembling hands.

"Now," said Shorty, "thar's your dough. I reckon I earned that commish yuh paid me."

"Sure thing," said Brewster happily. "Now we'll bust down to the bank and cash this an' git the money up the hill to that ol' sheep-herder an' git his bill of sale for that place before he changes his mind."

"Perfect, perfect!" said Shorty.

"Hop to it!" said the sheriff genially.

The three men turned to the door to go. Shorty glanced at his watch nervously, but he looked up with a slight smile as a knock sounded and the door was flung open and in came Gus Phillips, the assayer.

"Bah!" he said, chucking down a handful of quartz on the sheriff's desk. "Gold—bah! Mica—an' flint—an' some

iron—but no gold—ain't worth thinkin' about!"

Sheriff Cook blinked.

"Wait a minnit, boys," said Shorty, and he waved the white-faced Mr. Brewster and the other two men back from the door with his six-gun, which he now wore in his right hand. "I got something to say—this stuff that the assayer says is the bunk is from yuhr mine, doggone it. I picked up some samples unbeknown to yuh while I was thar, and I left 'em with Gus when I sneaked out o' the bank fer a minnit an' left yuh thar."

Sheriff Cook's face was going white.

"Yuh played a nice hand," admitted Shorty, "an' I see now that yuh all was trying to hook ol' Pop McFadden, down to the hotel, when I busted in an' yuh decided to hook me! Yep, yuh-all played a nice hand—fixin' up that old tunnel, layin' bare that vein that did look like gold to a cow-punch deputy like me. But I wasn't so dumb. I had yuh both ways. When I got suspicious I took them samples, knowin' that ef yuh was aimin' to hook us I'd know just as soon as Gus assayed them samples, an' ef they turned out all right then I knew I was lettin' the sheriff in on a mighty good proposition."

Sheriff Cook, stunned by the realization that he had been handsomely played for a sucker, could only gasp.

"Brewster," said Shorty, swinging his gun, "please be good enough to tear up that ten-thousand-dollar check!"

Brewster did it, reluctantly.

"We thought we had this thing figgered out right—we thought——" and then he stopped.

"Yuh thought wrong," boomed Shorty. "Soon as I got suspicious I had yuh comin' an' goin'—an' now, although I reckon yuh-all should be held fer tryin' to defraud a sheriff an' his deputy, but since yuh've tore up the sheriff's check, an' ain't defrauded him none, an' since yuh've paid me my five hundred dollars commish, as yuh said yuh would, an' ain't defrauded me none—I reckon yuh can blow. But just tell any crooks yuh meet in yuhr travels that Monte Vista has a dern bright deputy sheriff—ain't that right, sheriff?"

But Sheriff Cook, who was busily engaged in picking up the telltale scraps of his ten-thousand-dollar check from the floor, where Brewster had dropped them, made no answer, seeing that Gus Phillips, the assayer, was still there, wondering what it was all about, and being that Gus was an elder in the most influential church in town.

"Grr-rrr-rrrr," mumbled Sheriff Cook.

"I'd like," spoke up Brewster, who still lingered on the threshold, "to ask just one thing; we thought our plan was waterproof. What made you suspicious—ef I may ask—you say you got suspicious—and our plan seemed perfect."

"Perfect! perfect!" echoed Shorty happily, "but yuh overlooked one bet. I told yuh I needed five hundred dollars to pay up on a ranch I owned—well, that ranch I own—or will own as soon as I pay up that last five hundred dollars, which yuh gave me, thanks—is the very sheep ranch yuh showed me this mawnin' up back o' yuhr mine. An' I knew I hadn't asked no fifteen thousand fer it, an' further, I figgered I didn't look like yuh said the owner did—a crazy old sheep-herder!"

Shorty raised his gun again.

But the astounded Mr. Brewster, with one jump, had landed in the great out of doors and was already beating it up toward the sky line, over which, at that moment, were twinkling the heels of his two companions, who had not waited to find out why their little plan to make ten thousand dollars had failed so miserably.

Proof on the Hide

by Hugh F. Grinstead

Author of "Some Sand and a Fish," etc.

MACK ROBERTS, his old legs bowed from years of contact with the barrel of a horse, his wrinkled face tanned by the wind and sun of many summers, grizzled beard bearing witness to the passage of time, rode his plump bay horse along the trail where it emerged from the chaparral and ran straight as a string across the open country to the little town of Mineral Hill. In the foothills five miles behind him lay his little ranch where he raised a few horses to sell, now that he was too old to stand the hardships of a regular hand on the big cattle ranches.

The cattlemen and homesteaders, even the sheepmen, he counted among his friends; for with age had come tolerance born of experience. In his young days none would have been before him in raiding the camp of a sheep-herder that had invaded the domain of the cattle king to whom he might profess loyalty at the time.

Now, as he reached the higher ground of the prairie country and swept the unobstructed horizon at a glance, he saw six horsemen approaching from his right. He urged his own mount forward in order to intercept them as they crossed the trail ahead of him; for to the old-timer range gossip was always a diversion, and among six men there was sure to be at least one acquaintance, likely more.

"I wonder what's their hurry," Mack mused as he watched the riders come toward him at a gallop. "If they was huntin' stray cattle they'd be spread out more or ridin' in pairs, an' it's most too late to be rounin' up the fall beef."

A few minutes later they were near enough to recognize the veteran cowpuncher, and more than one of them raised a hand in greeting or called to him in friendly banter as they drew up within a few yards of him.

"Come along, old-timer," invited the man riding in the lead, a ranchman by the name of Lamy, whom he knew by sight. "We are goin' to run out a nester, a feller over close to me on Two Mile that's been rustlin' beef. Knowed you'd want to be in on it as you always sided in with us cattlemen when they was trouble with sheep-herders an' nesters."

"Why'n't you have the sheriff nab him an' send him to the pen reg'lar, 'stead o' runnin' him out jest to begin stealin' somewheres else?" Mack queried.

"Ain't no call to waste the county's

money that a way," Lamy replied. "Then, like as not he'd come clear if he got a slick lawyer. I'm just leavin' it to the boys, though, whether they want to run him out or hang him—either way suits me."

"You caught him a-stealin' already an' didn't shoot him or nothin'?" Mack asked with an incredulous squint.

"N-no, not exactly," Lamy replied, "but we know in reason that he's been stealin' from more'n one of us. He's been sellin' beef over to Min'ral Hill, an' just two-three days ago I misses a big red steer that I'm bettin' he butchered. It was a steer I got from Tom Holt, an' I just put my brand on him last week. Ain't that so, Jake?" He turned for corroboration to the man who rode behind him.

"Yep, I helped Joe put his L A on the critter after he driv him home, an' figger I'd pretty nigh know the hide with the brand cut out," replied Jake Freeman. "I lost two fat beeves myself this fall, but I didn't suspicion this hombre till Joe tells me about losin' that red steer an' about this feller sellin' beef."

"An' that's why I'm roundin' up these boys to take along—for witnesses," Lamy hastily put in. "All of us has had stuff stole, but we didn't know who was gettin' it. When I found out enough to suspicion this nester, I says we'll all go along together an' find out for sure, then nobody can't say it ain't square or that it's spite work to get rid of him."

"Good idee to have everything reg'lar an' witnesses a-plenty," Mack agreed. "Now who is this tough hombre?"

"Name's Brady; come in here from nobody knows where, about a year ago, an' takes up a homestead a little way down the creek from me," Lamy replied. "He had a few cattle, an' I ain't noticed but what they're all there yet whilst he's been sellin' a beef over to town every two-three weeks. Looks plumb suspicious."

"Uh-huh," Mack agreed absently. "Has he got any fambly?"

"Well, he did have a wife an' kid, but they up an' went off a month or so ago, which don't look right. He's a close-mouthed cuss; don't tell nobody about his business. These nesters what come in here without nobody knowin' nothin' about 'em'll do to watch."

"They's good nesters an' bad uns," Mack declared. "Now how you figger you're goin' to get the goods on this feller, Brady?"

"We'll ride right up an' call his hand. If he raises a fuss about havin' us look about his place, we'll know he's guilty, an' if we do look it won't be no great lot o' trouble to find some signs. No matter how slick a crook is, I reckon he'll overlook somethin'."

"Most always he will," Mack agreed.

The cavalcade rode on in silence for a little way. They came presently within sight of an insignificant cabin and a small corral near by. They rode up to the corral gate, and a man who was forking hay to some calves looked up with a faint smile of welcome that faded to an expression of concern when he detected the serious air of his visitors.

There was a moment of tense silence as the men shifted uneasily in their saddles and glanced expectantly toward Lamy, upon whom they tacitly placed the burden of leadership.

"Look here, Brady," Lamy began, taking the cue the others had given by their silence, "these men here—all of us—has got suspicions about you. We been losin' beef, an' bein' as you're a newcomer an' butcherin' some, you got to admit it looks suspicious. Reckon if you ain't guilty you wouldn't mind if we looked about your place."

Brady's eyes flashed indignantly for a moment, then, as if realizing the advisability of submitting to the search and taking the accusation as quietly as possible, he made a gesture of assent.

"Search all you want to," he said sulkily, with a frown in Lamy's direction. "You won't find any of your beef or your hides around here. There is a hide on the fence back of the shed that hasn't any brand on it. I bought the critter from a man over on Lone Elm, butchered it, and sold the beef at Mineral Hill yesterday."

"How come it ain't got no brand on it?" queried Ben Collins, one of the men Lamy had brought with him.

"The man I got it from brought it from Iowa with him when it was a yearling, and they don't brand their cattle back there—just earmark them if they do anything at all."

"Anyway, we'll just take a look," Lamy put in as he led the way into the corral, followed by the others, while Brady went on about his chores with an ugly scowl on his face.

The hide, thrown carelessly over the fence with the flesh side up, was the first thing that attracted their attention. Lamy took one end, while a companion took the other, and they pulled it off to the ground. A deft flip and it lay flat, though somewhat wrinkled, with the hair side up.

There was a splotch of half-dried mud on the part that had covered the side of the beast, and when Lamy had kicked away the incrusted dirt, there was plainly revealed a freshly burned brand, the bold "L A" that all of Joe Lamy's cattle bore on the left side!

"If he ain't a plumb fool!"

"Thought he'd bluff us into believin' that hide didn't have no brand on it so's we wouldn't look close."

"No doubt he's the thief."

These comments came from three of the group, each voicing the same general opinion from a different aspect of the case.

A moment later they all started toward the front of the corral, where they had left Brady—all except old Mack Roberts, who stooped over and minutely examined the brand on the hide and the hair around it. The men had half expected to find Brady in retreat, possibly on one of their own horses left standing at the corral gate. Instead, they met him coming round the shed toward them.

"Well, what did you find?" he asked gruffly, almost triumphantly.

Lamy pointed toward the hide spread out on the ground, the men making way for the owner of the corral. When Brady saw the fresh brand that had been exposed by scraping away the crust of dried mud, he stopped short, his face turning first a brick red, then going pale beneath the tan. He made an effort to speak, choked on the first word, and was interrupted by Lamy, who suggested sarcastically:

"Reckon you'll say that ain't the hide of the brute you butchered, or maybe claim that mud was plastered on there when you bought the critter an' stayed on there all the time you was drivin' it home an' butcherin'.. An' I reckon you'd say it was a accident that a piece o' hide was cut out'n the flank right where they was a white spot on that steer o' mine. Jake Freeman'll swear to that mark on my steer, an' they's a piece the size of two hands missin' from this, leavin' it plumb red."

"No, I won't deny it's the hide of the animal I killed and skinned," Brady declared with a slow shake of the head. "That brand wasn't on there, nor neither was the mud, when I skinned it; it's a frame-up to hang something on me."

There was a moment of silence, then some one guffawed ominously and without mirth. Plainly enough the explanation of the man had made no impression upon his listeners.

"Frame-up, huh!" Lamy mimicked. "I allowed you'd spring some excuse like that, an' that's why I fetched along these other fellers. Reckon you'll say such men as Buck Carter an' Ben Collins, over there, an' Mack Roberts 'u'd

pick on a feller just for fun. I ain't claimin' to be no great shakes myself, but they ain't no better men in the county than them."

"Oh, come, let's string him up!" exclaimed Ben Collins, red-headed and impulsive. "We got all the evidence we need."

"No, I won't have that," Lamy objected with a magnanimous wave of the hand. "It's my steer he got, an' I reckon he c'n square it with me by leavin' the country, bein' as he's got a family. Just to show I ain't underhanded nor nothin' I'll buy all the stuff he's got here on the range, if he ain't got time to take it along with him."

"I'm entitled to a fair trial and every chance to maintain my innocence. You'll have to prove that I'm guilty," Brady declared boldly.

"You'll get a quick-enough trial an' no expense to the county," Jake Freeman put in. "Mack Roberts bein' the oldest man among us'll act as judge, an' we got all the witnesses to hand. How about it, Mack?"

"Accordin' to the law o' the range, which was here before the courts come, we got a right to pass jedgment," Mack replied. "If we vote he's guilty, I reckon he'll have to leave, but we'll give him the benefit of the doubt."

"Reckon they won't be no doubt with that branded hide there testifyin' agin' him," Ben Collins suggested.

"Well, we got to have 'nother witness," Mack declared. "Jake, you ride over an' git Joe's brandin' iron what you an' him branded this steer with. Reckon it ain't been used sence, has it, Joe?"

"N-no, but hold on, what you want with my brandin' iron; ain't the 'L A' on that hide proof enough it was made with my iron?"

"I ain't doubtin' it none, but I got my reasons for wantin' it."

"Well, I'll ride over an' get it; Jake maybe wouldn't know where to find it."

"I want you should stay here, you bein' the principal witness," Mack objected. "I reckon if Jake helped you brand the critter, he knows where the iron is. We allow to begin this trial right now whilst we're waitin' for Jake to get back. A short hoss is soon curried, an' if they ain't no ev'dence in rebuttal, it ain't goin' to take long to finish the case.

"Reckon this prisoner has got a right to his say," he continued, "an', accordin' to the laws o' the range, he c'n talk first an' last, providin' he don't say too much an' talks to the point. Maybe this ain't the way them jedges up to Min'ral Hill handles they cases, but I reckon we'll get at the truth about as well an' a heap quicker. Now, mister prisoner, if you feel like it you can cut your wolf loose an' tell us how come we find a hide with Joe Lamy's brand on it a-hangin' on your fence whiles you been peddlin' beef in town."

"The brand wasn't on there when I killed the steer," Brady sullenly maintained. "I hung the hide on the fence right where you found it. If I had killed a steer with the 'L A' brand on it, I certainly wouldn't have been fool enough to leave the hide where it could be found. I have a right to kill a beef and peddle it out; it's about the only way a homesteader can make a living, what with having his fences cut and his stock run off."

Mack was silent a moment. "What kind o' horns did this animal have?" he suddenly asked. "I figger we can come at the truth that a way. We'll let you describe the head of your brute; then Joe Lamy can tell us about the one he claims you stole. It won't be no trick to find the head layin' around where you throwed it when you butchered."

"The steer I killed had been dehorned," Brady replied, "but I'm afraid I can't prove my innocence that way. I noticed this morning, early, that the head was gone from where I had left

it just over the fence. I thought the coyotes must have drug it off, but couldn't find a trace of it or any sign of a trail they had made."

"Reckon maybe you was away from home most of yest'day."

"Yes. I went to town with the beef and didn't get home until after night."

"Well, here comes the other witness," Mack announced as Jake Freemen rode up with Joe Lamy's branding iron. "If it don't tell no certainer tale than you told, pardner, I reckon you're in the middle of a plumb bad fix."

Lamy made as if to take the branding iron from Freeman, but old Mack reached out his own hand for it. He held the iron up and closely examined it; then, smoothing out the cowhide with his hands, he set the iron directly over the brand that had been made with it. The men crowded forward to look, Brady among the others, curious to learn what the old man expected to prove by his queer application of the iron.

He stretched the hide carefully until there were no wrinkles in it around the brand, and with the iron directly over the scar, a little of the seared skin showed at the extremity of the L, while the A bulged in the center.

"It don't jibe," he announced as he stood up. "Them letters on the hide ain't exactly the same size an' shape of this brandin' iron."

"Huh!" Lamy snorted derisively. "You can't expect to fit the brand on a loose hide to the iron that made it when it was stretched on the critter."

"Just as I allowed," Mack retorted. "Any man what has ever handled hides knows they begin to draw up soon's they're took off'n the brute, so a brand would be smaller an' not bigger than 'twas before. Then I reckon any of you what has got better eyes than I got, could see the scorched hair right next to the brand, which ain't stayin' on a week after the iron has been put on it. Likewise, if you ain't lost your smell, you could smell it fresh if you got close. That brand was put on there with this iron after the hide was took off, an' the man what done it was in too big a hurry to stretch the hide, else it wouldn't bulge out now bigger'n the iron is."

Brady was leaning forward with a hopeful expression while Lamy shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. The others looked on attentively.

"Aw, what's all this bosh you're fixin' up?" Lamy growled out angrily. "Reckon the rest of us has got somethin' to say, an' we vote to run this cow thief out. Ain't that the truth, boys?"

He got no response this time, for the other men were intent upon the words of the older man.

"An' I reckon, too, if you'd look you might see this brandin' iron has been cooled off in a mud puddle, maybe made by that rain we had night afore last. Right there by the fence is such a puddle, which it ain't without reason has a tale to tell."

He took the three steps that separated him from a slight depression near the fence, and there in the half-dried earth he pointed out a distinct impression of the iron he held in his hand, while the imprint of a hand showed where the mud came from that had plastered the hide where it had been freshly branded. There was still a coating of mud of the same kind on the branding iron.

"Maybe, now, Joe Lamy could tell how come that blood on his saddle if it ain't from that steer's head he toted off an' hid just after he put his brand on this hide last night or yest'day whilst they was nobody about. Likewise, that scrap of hide where he says they was a white spot on the hide was cut out a heap recenter than the skinnin' was done. Reckon we might find where they'd been a fire somewhere around here to heat that iron."

Joe Lamy had edged away from the

others, and now he flung back as he went toward his horse:

"I reckon I ain't goin' to have nothin' to do with it if you're goin' to turn that cow thief loose on such ev'dence."

"Hold on, Lamy," Mack called. "We ain't got all the ev'dence in yet, or I reckon we might have pretty nigh enough to send you to jail 'stead of this man you been tryin' to run out'n the country because he's crowdin' your range a little. Reckon the law might allow you to stay where you are, but I reckon these boys'll say about thirty days is all the time you'll need to wind up your affairs an' hunt a new range. Like enough, if we hunted up more ev'dence we'd find out who's been stealin' them beeves, which we won't if you git out."

Without replying, Lamy swung into his saddle and galloped off. The other men stood awkwardly about for a time; then each in turn extended his hand to Brady with a sheepish apology.

"Yes, I reckon Joe Lamy was right," Mack Roberts remarked. "No matter how slick a crook is he'll overlook somethin', 'specially when he tries to do too much an' leaves things layin' around that any man with cow sense'll see."

AN INDIAN TO RUN FOR CONGRESS

MONTANA Indians, apparently aroused by the recent enactment of the Indian citizenship bill, are said to be taking an ever-increasing interest in politics. Several Indians, educated in the reservation schools, have filed papers in the past year for county offices. Robert Yellowtail, however, a three-quarter blood Crow Indian, of Lodge Grass, on the Crow Reservation in Montana, announced some time ago his intention to run for the office of representative to Congress from Montana.

Yellowtail, who is thirty-five years old, completed his education by private tutoring, after his graduation from reservation schools. Encouraged by his tribesmen, he recently filed for Congress from the second district. He is opposing Congressman Scott Leavitt, of Great Falls, who is completing his first term.

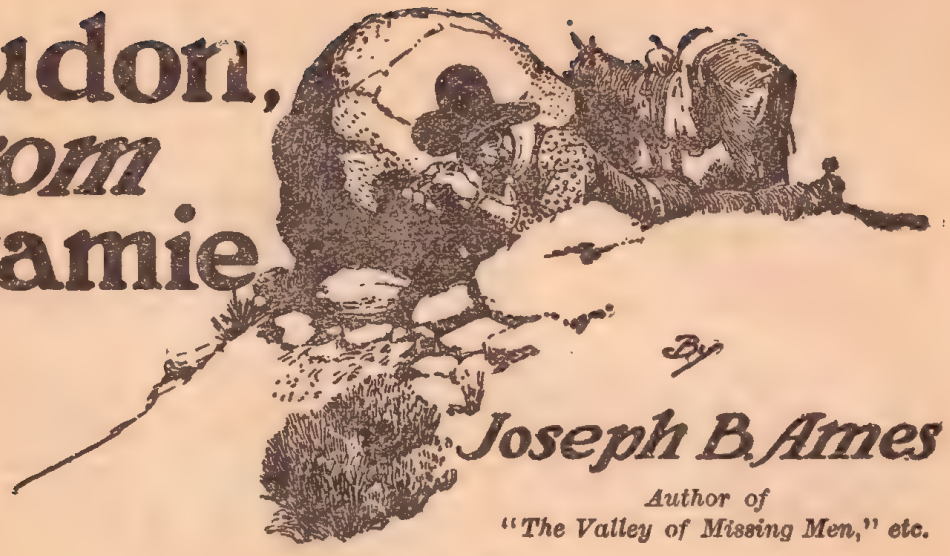
Montana's Indian population numbers thirteen thousand, of whom seven thousand live in the second congressional district. More than twenty-five hundred Indians from the six reservations will be allowed to vote this year. Yellowtail, who gives his occupation as a rancher, announces he will base his campaign on his knowledge of Indian affairs.

ELK RULES BUFFALO HERD

A LORDLY bull elk rules a herd of buffaloes in a paddock at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. F. E. Slattery, for many years the custodian of the park, says the elk is not required to use force to have his orders executed. Usually there are fifteen to twenty buffaloes in the inclosure where the elk resides. Combat in the paddock evidently is distasteful to him, for he frequently separates two belligerent buffalo bulls, shooing them aside in different directions.

Furthermore, he watches over the habits of the buffaloes. When he decides that they have lolled in recumbent posture too long and should be up and grazing, he goes in among them, touches them lightly with his antlers, and they rise and amble away. Slattery says he has never seen the elk's authority disputed or his orders disobeyed.

Loudon, *from* Laramie



By

Joseph B. Ames

Author of
"The Valley of Missing Men," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

TEX LOUDON, who has made something of a success as a cowboy detective, is engaged by an old friend, Doug Ballard, to get the goods on the "Lanarks," owners of the Hashknife outfit, who are rustling cattle from neighboring outfits, including the Rafter M and the Hundred and One outfits.

Loudon is on the point of learning the secret hiding place of the rustlers when he sees Jean Sewell, of the Lazy D, riding alone and a horseman—Carl Lanark of the Hashknife outfit—following her. He immediately leaves his lookout and goes to the rescue of the girl. Loudon requests Jean not to mention his name in connection with the encounter.

The next night Tex Loudon trails into the town of Boulder with a bunch of cowboys of the Rafter M. While in Bart Lasalle's gambling place Tex is shot at by Carl Lanark, who is lurking in the shadows outside. Tex sidesteps in time to avoid the shot. Confusion follows.

On their way to visit Colonel Fairfax, Aunt Serena and Jean discover the dead body of Carl Lanark. Jean discovers a neckerchief belonging to Tex Loudon crumpled in the dead man's hand. Just as two riders come up, Jean snatches the incriminating evidence and hides it. The approaching horsemen suspect some trickery.

Tex Loudon later overhears Roth Lanark and Vrooman plan a ride to the estate of Colonel Fairfax to get the colonel's Chinese servant. They believe he is guilty of the murder. Tex decides to warn the colonel of the plot and to aid him in protecting his servant.

Tex arrives at the estate of the colonel ahead of the riders, but the colonel handles the latter single-handed, and later, in the presence of Tex, he destroys the scarf that had been found by Jean on the dead body of Carl Lanark. Tex goes to Jean and expresses appreciation for what she has done.

Tex Loudon learns that McCormack owes Lasalle money, and that the latter demands a cash payment. McCormack has just made a shipment of cattle, and Tex suspects that Lasalle has arranged with the Lanarks to hold up the messengers who are carrying the money. Tex and McCormack race madly to prevent the holdup. The money, however, has been stowed in a saddle, and although Tex and McCormack arrive too late to prevent the holdup, the money has been saved.

Tex, according to prearranged plans, is fired from the Rafter M Ranch and seeks employment with the Hashknife outfit. He succeeds, and on a trip into the town of Ellensville to get the ranch mail, Tex discovers cattle in the shipping pens marked with the Block O brand, rebranded from the Hundred and One. He also finds Brody and Mason, who are supposed to be looking after the Hashknife interests, drunk.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE.

LESS than an hour later Loudon disengaged himself from the affectionate embrace of Peaches Mason, and, having paid two bits for the tolerable dinner, sought the corral where he had left the chestnut.

Peaches had proved tractable beyond even his most sanguine expectations. Having at first taken Loudon for a messenger from Steve Lanark to inquire into the cause for their delay, his maudlin relief when he discovered the truth was so poignant that he opened his mind freely to this new friend, whom he seemed to feel he had known for years.

With an earnestness marred somewhat by incoherence and repetition, he as-

sured Tex that the tedium of waiting had grown almost intolerable, but what could a fellah do? The so-and-so and-then-some railroad was altogether to blame; but the slinkin', crawlin', cow-faced station master had promised them the cars some time that afternoon. Meanwhile, he had zealously preserved the shipping directions and other papers intrusted to him by Lanark. Not a soul should get a glimpse of them save over his dead body. In proof of which he produced the documents in question and pressed them on Loudon so that he might see for himself that they were quite intact.

Tex saw, and made mental notes which he presently carefully transcribed on paper. It was like taking candy from a kid, he reflected as he rode back along the main street, and there was little chance that when Mason sobered up he would have more than the most hazy recollection of the occurrence. Of course if he did happen to remember and mention the matter to old Steve Lanark, the consequences might be exceedingly unpleasant. But the two punchers were not likely to return to the ranch within five or six days at the earliest, and Loudon had never been one to cross bridges before he came to them.

Though the days which followed this fortunate chance were not productive of anything dramatic, Tex gradually became assured of a number of minor points which all bore on his plans. He was no longer followed or spied upon; this seemed quite certain. Apparently the Lanarks had come to the conclusion that he was what he purported to be and, superficially at least, he was treated precisely like the other men. He was dispatched on various duties to different sections of the range, spent a night at one of the distant line camps with three other punchers, and drove in to Ellensville for some freight. At almost any moment during these various excursions he could, if he had been inclined, have slipped away and got safe beyond the reach of the outlaws before they became aware of his departure.

But Loudon had no desire to slip away. Indeed, nothing would have induced him to willingly give up the advantage he had gained at a moment when the lure of the game was becoming more and more intriguing with every passing hour. He had a feeling that at almost any moment the chance might come to forge that final connecting link in the chain of evidence which would mean the end of Lanark domination.

The brand of McCormack's stolen pony, shot while in possession of the Hashknife foreman, had been altered to a Block O. That was a definite fact. It was also a fact that Steve Lanark had shipped several carloads of Block O steers to a dealer in a neighboring State. This also was capable of proof aside from Loudon's unsupported statements. But in both these cases the brands had been perfectly healed and even an expert might be hard put to swear that they had been altered.

What Tex wanted now was to discover the location of that secret hiding place where the rustled cattle were kept until the process of nature made it safe to bring them out into the open. If he could do this—could bring reliable witnesses to back him up, he believed that he would have a case which the governor must take notice of even if local biased officials turned him down.

To find that hidden spot was therefore paramount, and a less acute person than Tex Loudon would have come—as he swiftly did—to suspect its general direction. It lay, he became quite certain, somewhere within a moderately restricted radius in that rough, difficult mountain wilderness almost due north of the camp. He had been sent freely to every other section of the outfit, but never there, though more than once he observed some of the other punchers slipping away in that direction. He had

even noted the exact spot at which they turned aside part way down the stony slope into the basin, and he itched for a chance to steal away for long enough to make a search.

But this opportunity did not seem to present itself, and meanwhile another element was injected into the situation which bade fair in interest and importance to rival that other search. Little by little the conviction grew in Loudon's mind that something quite unusual was in the wind. He had nothing really definite to go on, but to one of his keen perceptions there was evident about the ranch a faint atmosphere, elusive yet sufficiently convincing, of suspense, of unseen forces stirring, which set his blood to tingling and made him even more alert than ever for the slightest, most insignificant sight or sound.

Almost every night, for instance, unseen riders galloped up to the ranch house, sometimes remaining an hour or so, at the latest departing before dawn. Once Scully, who had been almost constantly about the outfit since Loudon's first appearance, was absent for a day and a night and patently parried Loudon's casual questions on his return. Again Tex, returning from the southern range a little earlier than he was expected, came in sight of the ranch house just as Roth Lanark and four of the punchers emerged from the gloomy building talking earnestly. At the sight of him they broke up and separated with a rather too casual air which did not escape Loudon's attention.

There were other things, in themselves trifling and of no apparent moment, but which helped confirm his belief that something big was on the point of being pulled off. Tex wondered whether it could have anything to do with the apprehension of Carl Lanark's murderer. Felix, to whose suave, foxy, impenetrable manner Tex had taken instant and vehement dislike, had been away for several days—staying at Boulder, some one said vaguely. Was it possible that he was engineering another attack on Colonel Fairfax, or a raid, perhaps, on some other unknown suspect who might have been ferreted out with the aid of Praol and Judd Vrooman?

Upon consideration this seemed scarcely important enough to account for the many messengers, the secret conferences, and all the other unusual happenings of which Tex had taken notice. In his keen desire to probe the mystery, Loudon even thought of Eve Lanark and wondered whether she was in the secret. Each time they met—which was at least once and sometimes twice a day—he studied her with a close yet subtle scrutiny which missed no passing shade of expression in her face, and in the end was forced to admit that he was baffled.

She evidently sought him out deliberately. That much was apparent, but her motive was more cryptic. Sometimes she chatted briefly in a cynical, half mocking sort of way; again, as if gripped by some black mood, she merely snapped out directions as to something she wanted done with the same curt insolence she had shown at their first meeting. Once or twice the mask slipped, revealing for an instant what Loudon had come to think of as the girl's real self. At such rare moments there was a strange, witching lure about her, a subtle fascination, not in the least deliberate or calculated, which Tex found amazingly attractive. But through all those varying moods it was impossible to guess to what extent she shared her father's confidence.

Balked in this direction also, Loudon's impatience presently reached a pitch when he was ready to take almost any chance to gain his ends, and that swiftly. Indeed, he must accomplish his purpose very soon or else be faced with the probability of failure. At any moment now Mason and Brody were likely to return, and even if the former had

forgotten his drunken frankness in the hotel dining room, he had not been so far gone as to lose all recollection of their meeting—a matter which Tex had kept entirely to himself. To a suspicious nature like Steve Lanark's, that suppression alone would be significant.

It was in this mood that Tex was unexpectedly summoned to the ranch house early one afternoon by old Steve himself. Roth had gone to Boulder directly after breakfast, and the elder Lanark appeared to be looking after things in his absence.

Loudon followed the messenger, Bull Kogy, with feelings of lively though suppressed curiosity. It was the first time he had ever had occasion to enter the ranch house, and though he kept up a continuous flow of casual conversation, he did not fail to use his eyes to full advantage.

Steve's office was located in the front left-hand corner of the somber stone building, but there was no door leading to it from the open. Indeed, the noticeable paucity of doors, together with the heavy iron shutters with which all the lower windows were equipped, had already convinced Tex that the place was built to withstand a siege. Passing through the front entrance, he found himself in a narrow, gloomy hallway with doors on both sides and a stairway rising in the rear.

"In there," said Kogy briefly, indicating a closed door on their left.

Loudon nodded, knocked, and in response to a curt command to enter, stepped into a fair-sized room equipped with a desk, shelves, a safe, half a dozen chairs, and a much-worn leather couch placed across one corner. A single window pierced each thick outer wall, but failed somehow to mitigate the somber atmosphere which lay over the place. Steve Lanark, seated at the desk, looked up from under his bushy, penthouse brows.

"Saddle up an' ride out to Lost Spring Camp," he directed without preamble. "I want Hank Mogridge up here right away."

"Right-o," acquiesced Tex. "We oughta get back around nine or ten o'clock, I expect."

"Hank oughta," corrected Lanark curtly. "You're to stay in camp."

"Oh, I get you. You want me to take Hank's place until——"

"Until you're sent for. Take orders from 'Pinch' McGowan. That's all. Don't go wastin' no time on the way."

Outside the building, Tex walked briskly toward the corral. His expression was of one entirely carefree and content; he even whistled as he strode along, hands thrust deep in his pockets. But back of that careless, casual mask he was doing some swift thinking.

Lost Springs Camp lay at the remote southern extremity of the Hashknife range, a good five hours ride away. To be buried there indefinitely would mean ruin to his plans, and Loudon had not the least intention of obeying the orders he had just received.

Having saddled the chestnut, he rode over to the bunk house and dismounted at the door.

"Gotta go to Lost Springs," he commented to Kogy, who was standing there. "Heaven knows how long I'll be holed up there, so I'm gonna take my war sack."

Passing the other, he made for his bunk, spread the slicker on the floor, and deftly rolled up his blankets and other belongings in it. With this strapped behind his saddle, he mounted again and, waving adieu to the unresponsive Kogy, headed south.

For something like twenty minutes he held steadily to that direction. Then, making certain that he was not followed, he turned abruptly to the left into a shallow gulch. An hour later, having made a wide circuit, he plunged into the rough, broken country to the northeast of the ranch house.

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Slowly and with infinite precaution he worked his way back to the point where he had seen various Hashknife punchers vanish from sight into this hilly wilderness. He had marked that location with care. A draw merged into a gully which in turn gave place to a narrow cañon that cut deeply into the side of the northern slopes. Part way along, this took a sharp turn and presently led up to a wooded range from which possible ways of travel branched off into three different directions.

There ensued a long, tedious interval of slow, laborious circling through the mountain country somewhere in whose remote fastness, Tex felt certain, lay the Hashknife secret hiding place. At first sight the task of locating this in the comparatively brief time at his command might seem impossible. But besides being a finished trailer, Loudon possessed an excellent sense of direction, and he constantly bore two important facts in mind. The place he sought must be fairly easy of access from the lower section of the basin. Also the way to it must be of such a nature that cattle could be driven along it at a tolerable rate of speed.

In spite of all these helps, however, he had more than one discouraging setback before penetrating finally into that unimportant-looking cañon which was to bring him so unexpectedly to his goal.

He would have passed it by as hopeless, save for a vaguely trodden look about a patch of sand outside the entrance. The rocky bottom preserved no further clews, but part way along the course of this narrow, insignificant slit, Tex drew rein abruptly and stared speculatively at a dense growth of cedars massed against the left-hand wall. Superficially they were in no wise different from a score of other clumps he had passed unnoticed, but his keen eye noted in passing that the tip of one of the outer branches had been partly broken and dangled limply.

"Looks fresh, too," he mused as he reined the chestnut closer. "Hasn't even begun to turn brown. I wonder——"

He broke off with a sudden, swift-drawn breath as he perceived that the cedars did not, after all, press close to the cañon wall. Indeed, now that he was close to them he saw that there was an open space behind the trees some six feet wide, and of a curious regularity. Hastily circling the end tree, whose broken branch had attracted his attention, he found himself facing a narrow, open slit in the cliffs, beyond which the crumbling rock shelved away abruptly, revealing glimpses of a long, narrow, cliff-girt valley beyond.

Eyes sparkling, Loudon urged his horse forward to presently draw rein with a muttered exclamation of mingled triumph and satisfaction. The way was barred by a stretch of rough fencing. Beyond it lay a sloping sweep of green —tough mountain grass and low bushes intermingled. He caught the glint of water from a meandering little stream, and scattered about that pleasant, sunlit surface were many groups of cattle feeding!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT LOUDON OVERHEARD.

IT took Loudon less than half an hour to make a comprehensive survey of the stock penned in that hidden valley. When he emerged again into the narrow, deceptively insignificant cañon, the expression on his pleasant, clean-cut face was one of extreme satisfaction.

He had examined steers on whose flanks the original Hundred and One brand showed plainly through the raw Block O like an accusing specter. There were a dozen or more horses on which the Lazy D had been converted by two deft strokes of the running iron, into a Hashknife. Most interesting of all to Loudon was the fact that the great bulk of stock in the valley had been stolen from Doug Ballard's outfit with the

Rafter M ingeniously altered to a Diamond on a Square.

"Never heard o' that brand outside of Arizona," Tex mused as he rode out into the cañon and turned to retrace his steps. "The old fox musta been gatherin' 'em for some time, makin' ready for another shipment with a forged bill o' sale like he did with them Block O's. I expect they've been snitchin' a few at a time, since Doug says he hasn't had any big raid in a good while. Well, we're gonna do our best to put a crimp in his crooked game, ain't we, Larry?"

As the chestnut wagged an ear and set off down the cañon, Loudon glanced back at the cedars with renewed appreciation of their excellence as a cover.

"Never think there was anythin' back of 'em but a wall o' rock," he said aloud. "I wouldn't have looked at 'em twice if it hadn't been for that danglin' bit o' branch. The thing now is to fan it back to Boulder an' get some reliable witnesses to chase up here an' look the place over. Old Steve is shore foxy usin' the other brands that way, but I reckon them Lazy D horses with the Hashknife stamped on top of 'em will cinch the case."

Emerging from the cañon, he held as steadily as possible to the south. Already during his circling he had crossed what seemed like an actual trail winding its way through the mountains in that direction. It would be natural of the Lanarks to have more than one hidden way of reaching the outfit from the basin. Like enough this one would merge farther on with the course he had taken that first afternoon with Roth Lanark.

With this in mind Tex proceeded with all possible speed. Darkness was not so very far away, and unless he came to some familiar location before dusk caught him, he might wander about this unknown wilderness all night.

Presently he reached the faint, illusive trail he had in mind and swerved into it. Indeed, he had followed its twisting, yet not difficult, course for several miles before the unexpected sound of a hoof striking against a stone made him drag the chestnut to an abrupt halt.

For a single instant he sat rigid in the saddle, every faculty concentrated in listening. The sound was repeated, and this time there could be no possible question of its significance. Two men were approaching from the east, riding, too, at a speed which must bring them into sight around a sharp bend some fifty yards ahead at almost any moment.

Swiftly Loudon's glance swept to right and left, but almost simultaneously he turned his horse. In this shallow gulch there was no possible cover. The sloping sides were bare of vegetation, and there were no rocks in sight large enough to hide even a coyote. But he recalled readily passing only a little while before the opening of what looked like an old dry watercourse which might serve his purpose. Without an instant of delay he urged the horse back along the trail, guiding the animal with all his skill to keep the horse from treading on the many loose stones which might betray them.

It was impossible to proceed much faster than a walk, and each time Loudon looked back he expected to find that the unknown riders had turned the bend behind him. But though the clatter of hoofs grew steadily louder and clearer, Tex managed to gain the watercourse unperceived, urged the chestnut into it, and down a steep descent, where he slid out of the saddle with a sigh of relief.

"Close!" he muttered, glancing hastily from side to side. "I wonder who in thunder they are!"

It would be interesting and perhaps profitable to find out, and the sight of a scraggly, misshapen jack pine not far away gave him an idea. Hurriedly tying the chestnut to it, he turned and sped back toward the trail where he had noticed some low boulders scattered along

the side of the dry watercourse that might possibly give him adequate shelter.

It was a tight squeeze, but by flattening his big body to the ground behind one boulder, and stretching his legs back of an adjacent one, Tex made the best of the situation. He suspected that a brief section of drab-covered leg was visible between the two rocks, and was perfectly aware that if either of the approaching strangers turned aside at this point for even a few feet, they could not fail to see him. But unless his horse made some betraying sound he saw no reason why they should turn aside, and though as a precaution he drew his Colt and held it loosely in his right hand, he scarcely thought he would have to use it.

The clattering of hoofs came on, and, mingled with them, was the sound of voices. One of these Tex swiftly recognized as belonging to Roth Lanark. The other, lower, more drawling, held also a teasing familiarity about it which the watcher was not slow to place.

"Bart Lasalle!" he decided definitely, his forehead crinkling with a network of puzzled lines. "I thought he never stirred from Boulder."

The first words whose meaning he could make out clearly, came from the Hashknife foreman.

"Can't help it. The old man says he won't decide finally until he's talked with you. He wants to ask a lot o' questions an' make shore o' your facts. It's a big thing, you know, Bart."

"Of course I know it," retorted the gambler, a touch of petulance in his weary voice. "But you don't seem to realize the pains I've taken to avoid just this very thing. If anybody found out I'd come to the Hashknife, the beans would be spilled for fair. All these years I've managed so that not a soul suspects we've been working together. A lot of sense there is in risking the reputation I've built up just to suit Steve's whims."

"You ain't riskin' much that I see," soothed Lanark. "Who's gonna find out you've made this trip? We won't strike the ranch till dusk, when the boys'll all be at supper. You can easy slip into the house without bein' seen. As soon as we've had somethin' to eat we'll talk this all out in pop's office with door an' windows shut an' the iron shutters drawn. You oughta get away by nine o'clock or so an' be back in town long before daybreak. If any o' the men did happen to get a glimpse o' you, there'd be no harm done, seein' as most of 'em are wise already."

"What about this new fellow—Loudon?"

Lanark chuckled. "Oh, he's took care of. Pop shipped him off to Lost Springs to-day to get him outa the way. He seems all right to me, but the old man ain't quite shore of him yet."

"Neither am I," commented Lasalle slowly. "I haven't been able to dig up a thing against him yet, but all the same I wouldn't trust him too far."

A grim smile flickered for an instant on Loudon's lips, but not a muscle of his long body stirred. The two riders had come abreast of his precarious hiding place. The breathing of the horses, the creak of saddle leather, the voices of the men were all so distinct that though Loudon's face was pressed against the warm earth, he could gauge with precision their exact whereabouts.

"Right now you don't have to," said Lanark. "Like I said, he's where he can't do no harm even if he had a mind to. Pop's gonna keep him there till after this business is over. Then I expect we'll give him a sort of third degree an' make dead shore o' where he stands. If he's all right, he'll make a good hand. If not——"

The pause was significant. Tex, breathing easier now that the two had passed on, could picture vividly the eloquent gesture which accompanied it.

"Uh-huh," drawled out Lasalle. "You

want to do it sudden an' complete, too. Already he knows a whole lot too much to be let go."

His voice was scarcely distinguishable now, for the wind was blowing in the other direction. Tex could not even make out Lanark's more blatant tones as he answered, and presently ventured to cautiously raise his head until his eyes were on a level with the boulder top.

The two men were about a hundred yards away, mounting a short, steep rise beyond which the trail dipped down into a hollow. Lasalle, astride a splendid roan, was clad in a perfectly fitting tweed riding suit with all the finicky accompaniments of polished boots, white stock, and immaculate, unspotted Stetson. His thoughtful gaze fixed steadily on the gambler's straight, slim-waisted back, Loudon watched them top the rise, where both figures were silhouetted clearly for an instant against the brilliant sky. Swiftly they vanished into the hollow beyond, but several moments more passed before Tex relaxed his cramped position and rose slowly to his feet.

What he had heard had been illuminating, but even more it stirred him to a keen, arresting curiosity as to the nature of the enterprise which was so evidently afoot. It was exasperating that the men should have given no more definite a hint, and Tex racked his brains in a desperate effort to hit upon some plausible answer to the question.

Both Lanark and Lasalle had termed it a "big thing." That eliminated at once the possibility of an ordinary cattle raid, the robbery of some miner, or any of the usual methods by which in the past the Hashknife crowd had laid illicit tribute on the basin. The stage rarely carried specie of any consequence, and there was no bank nearer than Sioux Junction. Somehow safe cracking, especially in that busy and comparatively populous county seat, did not seem quite in the Lanarks' line. It was too apt to rouse a stir outside their special sphere of influence and result in unwelcome attentions and widespread inquiries and investigations.

But what else was there which would fit in with what he had overheard, and the general sense of bustle and preparation Tex had noticed on the ranch during the past few days? Loudon could not imagine; but the more he considered it, the more he felt that he could not let the matter drop without a desperate effort to find out. Whatever they had in mind it was something big and something crooked—something, also, he guessed, likely to employ practically the whole strength of the Hashknife outfit. The result of his investigations of their cattle rustling activities was certain, but the process of getting effective official action in the matter would probably be slow. If only he could find out the details of this fresh villainy in time to forestall them, to trap them somehow in the very act, the result he had been working for so long, might well be instant, drastic, and far-reaching.

For at least five minutes Loudon stood motionless, thinking hard. Then, with a sudden, decisive jerk of his head, he turned abruptly and went back to where he had left his horse. Unstrapping the roll from behind his saddle, he spread it open on the ground and took out his field glasses and a folded paper, the latter Tom Britton's bill of sale for the chestnut. Tying the bundle up again, he dropped it behind some rocks, part way up the shallow slope, mounted Larry, and urged him toward the trail.

The nature of the enterprise on which he had so unexpectedly embarked made it essential to strip himself of every unnecessary pound. Later he could return and gather up his belongings, which were unlikely to be disturbed in this remote gulch. But as he rode swiftly westward, Tex had a feeling that if he succeeded he wouldn't care if he never saw his

stuff again. In case of failure it was entirely certain that he would have no further use at all for mundane things.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PLOT.

THE queer, sinister shadow of that lone peak had long fallen over the gloomy Hashknife ranch house and dusk was rapidly deepening into night, when a face peered out of a tangle of tamarack sixty yards or so from the nearest corner of the stone building, and a pair of brilliant eyes swept the plateau with a keen, appraising scrutiny.

As far as Loudon could determine, there was no one in sight. From the shelter of the feathery tamaracks he had just seen the slim, lithe figure of Eve Lanark appear around the farther corner of the ranch house and enter the front door, which she closed audibly behind her. Now, as he watched, a light sprang up in one of the upper windows.

For a moment or two longer Tex stood motionless, studying the building intently. He had already observed that the iron shutters on the office windows were closely drawn. Save for that faint flicker in the upper chamber, there was no spark of light visible anywhere except a mellow, yellow glow that seemed to be reflected from the kitchen in the rear.

For a space Loudon was tempted to slip around and investigate, but almost as quickly he abandoned the idea. There was no use adding risks to an already sufficiently hazardous situation. At any moment some one might appear from the bunk house, which he could not see from where he stood, or the cook issue unexpectedly from that rear door before he could slip back into hiding. Besides, he had followed so close upon the heels of Roth Lanark and his companion that he knew they could not possibly have had time to finish supper. He felt quite certain that at this moment they must be occupied with the meal in the dining room which lay at the farther extremity of the house.

"Anyhow, I've got to take a chance, an' take it quick," he reflected. "There ain't any time a-tall to waste."

Stepping noiselessly from the thicket, he moved swiftly toward the building, reached the wall, and, keeping close within its shadow, gained the corner where he paused again for a second to rake the front with a sweeping, comprehensive glance.

No one was in sight, and a queer, oppressive sort of stillness seemed to lie over the plateau. It was almost as if some sinister spell of silence had been cast over the place—a silence which held no reassurance, but rather an underlying sense of impending evil. Tex himself was conscious of a slight quickening of his breath as he slid noiselessly along the front wall and reached the door, whose slam had been the last definite sound impressed upon his consciousness.

For a second or two he stood there motionless, muscular fingers closing about the knob with a firm gentleness. That simile of the spider lurking in its web flashed for an instant into his mind with renewed point and poignancy. There was still time to draw back, but nothing was farther from his intention. Eve Lanark's late return seemed, indeed, almost providential. If she had failed to lock the door behind her—and he had heard no click of key or scrape of bolt—one of the chief difficulties which threatened the success of his mad plan, had been removed.

Gently he turned the knob and thrust cautiously against the heavy door. It yielded to the pressure and, a moment later he was standing in the dark hallway, his back against the thick planking he had drawn to after him. No glimmer of light was visible anywhere, but from somewhere on his right there came the faint, subdued murmur of voices.

They were still at supper, then, as he had counted on. But the realization did not incline Tex to dawdling. At any moment the girl might appear at the head of the straight, narrow stairs, so without wasting any time Loudon tiptoed across the rough planking until his outstretched fingers touched the left-hand wall. Feeling along it, he presently encountered the casing of the door leading into Steve Lanark's office, and a moment later found the latch and pressed it gently.

The door creaked slightly as it opened on the pitch blackness of the office. The air was warm and stuffy, but Tex lost not an instant in sliding into the room and closing the door cautiously behind him. Nor did he pause once he was inside. He remembered perfectly the shape and location of the shabby, leather-covered couch, and urged on by the sound of footfalls on the stairs which had come to him just as the door swung to, he felt his way across the room, stepped over the back of the couch, and stretched his long length against the wall behind.

How long he waited there he had no definite notion. He knew, of course, that the delay seemed longer than it actually was. But for all that he was unpleasantly conscious of the hot, stuffy atmosphere of the closed room and there was time to develop an ominous cramp in one leg before the latch clicked, the door swung open, and a shaft of lamplight struck obliquely across the floor beneath the sofa.

"Step in an' shut the door," came in Steve Lanark's crisp, curt accents.

Footsteps followed, a chair scraped, the wavering light grew steady; a pair of delicate, polished riding boots suddenly appeared within Loudon's limited range of vision, and the bottom of the couch sagged slightly.

"Frightfully stuffy here," complained the weary, languid voice of Bart Lasalle. "Couldn't we leave the hall door open?"

"I ain't takin' any chances," the elder Lanark answered shortly. "I reckon you'll have to stand it for half an hour or so. If you'd smoke good, honest tobacco instead o' them made up things, we'd all mebbe be able to breath better."

"I smoke what suits me," returned the gambler, a sudden chilly note slanting through his low, drawling tones. "Suppose we get down to business," he added quietly. "I've got considerable of a ride ahead of me, an' I'm not anxious to sit around here any longer than I have to. What is it you want to know?"

"A lot o' things. How'd you get wind o' this business? How come you to find out the exact amount the government's shippin', an' are you dead shore o' your facts? Why should they take the trail through the basin when they've never come that way before? Are you certain there ain't any mistake about the time they leave Sioux Junction? You answer them questions an' we'll be ready to get down to the discussion."

The couch creaked and the crackle of a match indicated that Lasalle was lighting another of his noxious Turkish cigarettes.

"I've already answered most of them either by letter or to Roth, here." Into his level, drawling voice Lasalle subtly injected a condescending tolerance which would have irked the sluggish emotions of a crab. "But since you seem to want to hear it all over again, here goes: I got wind of it first through a friend of mine at Fort Wentworth. There's no question about his playing fair with me, an' he's in a position to know the facts. They've been making extensive alterations at the post and the contractor doesn't get paid until the work's finished. It was passed on yesterday, and on Friday of this week, the first, he'll have about eight thousand dollars coming to him. With the regular regimental pay and et ceteras, there'll be a shipment of nearly eleven thousand cash from Sioux Junction Thursday morning."

"H'm," grunted Steve Lanark. "Why should they go through Boulder when they allus take the north trail across the divide?"

Lasalle sighed gently. "The bridge south of Allerton was carried away by a cloud-burst last week. The trail's impassible for a wagon. They've got to come this way or take a much longer detour to the north. They're counting on making the trip safely because they've kept the whole thing a dead secret, and the money will be carried in a regular supply wagon hidden under commissary stuff."

"If it's been kep' a secret, how'd your friend come to wise up so slick?" inquired the elder Lanark sharply.

"He knew the money was due and that they couldn't use the old trail. When he found there was to be a meeting of some of the officers, he slipped into the commandant's office ahead of them and hid in the closet."

Though his legs were cramped almost beyond endurance and he was half smothered by the dust of ages accumulated back of the couch, Loudon grinned delightedly at the coincidence. It struck him as distinctly ironic that these men who had gained their information from the eavesdropping of a crooked confederate should, all unknowingly, be served in a precisely similar fashion.

"It's close to ninety miles," mused Lanark. "If they leave Sioux Junction at sunup Thursday, it'll take 'em all of two days to make the Post."

"Exactly," agreed Lasalle. "They're planning to take the basin trail as far as Boulder and branch off there to the north. They count on laying up for the night at Huger's outfit, but we mustn't let 'em get that far or they're likely to slip through our fingers. My idea would be to lay for 'em somewheres about five miles north of Boulder. It's a lonely stretch with plenty of cover, and if you do the thing up brown and use proper care, the chances are no one will ever know exactly what happened. The wagon and the horses—and the men will simply have dropped out of sight somewhere in that eighteen miles between Boulder and Huger's place."

"Mebbe," grunted Lanark dubiously. "Still an' all, I ain't much in love with the idea o' mixin' up with the government. I always made a point o' steerin' clear o' that bunch at Fort Wentworth. They're a bunch o' dubs, but once they get roused up an' on a fellah's trail, they stick till the hot place freezes over."

"Give 'em a trail to stick to, then," suggested Lasalle calmly.

"Whatta you mean?"

"Make one to order that'll lead 'em back to—to McCormack's outfit for instance. Not too plain or obvious, of course. But let a wheel mark show here an' there an' plant the wreck o' the wagon in some out-of-the-way place on his land. You might even shoot a Hundred and One horse and leave him a little way back from where you stage the holdup, as if he was plugged by one of the troopers before he cashed in."

"It might be done," commented Lanark grudgingly. "An' I wouldn't mind getting square with that son of a gun for pluggin' Hank."

Again Loudon's lips twitched, but only momentarily. The matter was developing in interest and importance so far beyond his expectations that he did not want to miss a word.

"Alla same," continued the old man reflectively, "we'd still be takin' mighty big chances. Though we got the lid clamped down pretty tight, there's still folks about the basin who'd up an' say we done a thing like this the minute they had word of it. Usually that ain't of any consequence, but——"

He was interrupted by an exclamation of impatience from Bart Lasalle. An instant later a silver cigarette case clanked to the floor and bounced under the edge of the couch on which he sat.

CHAPTER XXX.

TRAPPED.

LOUDON'S first impulse was to hastily slip back into the recess behind the couch. But swiftly he realized that he dared not even move a muscle, for in the silence which had fallen on the room the slightest rustle would betray him. For what seemed an eternity he lay rigid, staring at the silver bauble which lay scarcely twelve inches from his nose.

"It's right back o' your left foot, Bart," said Roth Lanark suddenly. "Bend down an' you can see it easy."

Loudon's spine tingled, and he rapidly calculated just how he would draw his gun and which man he would "get" first in case Lasalle followed the suggestion. Then one of the gambler's polished boots moved slightly, and Tex held his breath as a slim, shapely hand appeared below the edge of the couch and fumbled about blindly. As the fingers groped one way and another, Loudon had a mad impulse to thrust the silver case within their reach. But he was afraid of the two Lanarks sitting across the room, and when at last Lasalle's fingers touched the case and closed about it, the eavesdropper's tense muscles relaxed and he found his forehead slightly dewed with perspiration.

"You were saying something about certain people in the basin being suspicious," drawled out Lasalle, when he had lit another cigarette. "Personally I can't see what difference that makes if you play your cards right."

"Shore!" cut in Roth Lanark eagerly. "An' lookit what we stand to win. Eleven thousand iron men is worth takin' a few chances for, I'd say. Like Bart says, the thing looks like a cinch to me. An' besides layin' that false trail to the Hundred and One, what's to prevent our makin' ourselves a good solid alibi to clinch it? Felix is in town investigatin' that hunch o' Zeke Proal's. He told me this mornin' he was gonna get to the bottom of it to-morrow, shore. Supposin' you should ride in with three—four men to see him about it Thursday mornin'? What time do you figger them troopers'll pass through town, Bart?"

"Between eleven an' twelve. They're about certain to stop off at Bascomb's for dinner."

Roth's chair creaked slightly and Loudon guessed that he was turning quickly to his father.

"You see?" he questioned swiftly. "You strike town a little before noon an' stick around in sight of everybody for three—four hours. You an' Felix'll both be in evidence, an' you might mention casual that I've taken a bunch o' steers to Ellensville. If it comes to a show-down, there's plenty people there who'll swear to anything we tell 'em."

"But instead of that, of course," put in Lasalle, a touch of unwonted animation in his tired voice, "he'll slip through the mountains with eight or ten picked men and make himself snug along the trail to Huger's. I get you right, don't I, Roth? Sure. It's a mighty good suggestion. Why, you'd be safe as a church, Steve. There isn't a chance in a million of anybody fastening it on you."

"How many men'll go along with the shipment?" inquired Steve Lanark briefly.

"A corporal and three privates. Any more would look fishy seeing as they're only supposed to be taking back a load of chuck."

"You shore o' that?"

"As certain as I am of the rest of the business. It was all decided in the commandant's office."

"You can trust this fellah you got the dope from?"

"Don't worry about that," Lasalle assured him. "I've got something on him that makes him toe the mark. Besides, he's counting on a rake-off, of course."

A prolonged silence followed. Tex wondered whether the old man was losing his nerve. According to all accounts this was an enterprise he ought to have seized with avidity. Was it possible that some subtle influence warned him subconsciously, like the prophetic writing on the wall? Abruptly the harsh voice broke the lengthening silence.

"What d'you expect to get outa this, Lasalle—the usual third?"

"A little more," returned the gambler coolly. "We'll have to split even this time."

"Split even!" rasped out the elder Lanark. "We take all the risks an' you sit back an' pocket half the profits! You shore got a gall."

"I've got to divide with the man at the Post," rejoined Lasalle, quite unperturbed. "I might also remind you of the value of the information I supplied. Without it you wouldn't have got far."

Another brief pause. Then:

"Waal, we won't fight about that." Under the iron composure of Steve Lanark's manner, Loudon seemed to detect a subtle hint of boiling passion. "We'll take it on. Roth'll leave here with a bunch o' men I can count on tomorrow afternoon. I know that trail, an' there's a spot about five miles north o' Boulder that'll suit us down to the ground. A sharp turn, plenty o' trees an' rocks, an' an easy get-away in three directions. You're wantin' to start back, I expect, Lasalle? Waal, I'll see you in town about noon, Thursday."

The couch creaked as the gambler rose and moved slowly toward the door. Back of it Loudon breathed a faint sigh of relief. It was over, then. A wave of triumph surged up within him at the thought of how completely he would foil the plotters and catch them in their own net. It was the chance of a lifetime to trap the whole corrupt crew including, he hoped, the wily Bart Lasalle. He longed to begin—to get into action, and yet was forced to lie motionless while Lasalle purred a few brief words of farewell before leaving the office in Roth's company.

The old man remained. Tex was aware of his presence only by that keen sense of hearing which apprised him that but two persons had left the room—this, and the continued glimmer of the lamp. For he made no sound. There was no creak of chair, no meditative tapping on the desk nor stir of foot upon the bare floor. Apparently Steve Lanark remained completely immovable as the minutes multiplied themselves until at last quick footsteps crossed the hall and entered the office.

"He gone?" demanded the elder Lanark abruptly.

"Yeah. Jest rode off. He's shore got a devil of a nerve," Roth added with sulphurous conviction.

"You said it. I've been thinkin' it over, though, an' it looks to me like he'd put one over on us. The skunk knows too much aside from this last business. If we don't give him what he wants, he's got us. That's the worst o' workin' with a slick one like him. Any time he's a mind to he could dish us, an' he's managed to keep his own name so clear, that I'm hanged if I think we could get back at him."

"There's one way o' settlin' his hash for good an' all," said Roth significantly.

"Yeah." There was a momentary pause, followed by the creaking of the old man's chair. "It may come to that, too. We'll talk it over later. You see anything o' Mogridge while you was out?"

"Hank? Why, no. He's at Lost Springs, ain't he?"

"When I shipped that Loudon fellah out this noon I told him to send Hank in. Like enough he's found I was busy an' hit the hay. It's later'n I thought. I'll talk to him to-morrow."

The light was abruptly extinguished,

plunging the room into darkness. Tex heard the door closed and the muffled sound of retreating footsteps, after which an enveloping silence fell over the stuffy office.

Beyond straightening his cramped legs, Tex made no attempt to move from where he lay. Though he assumed that both Lanarks would go straight to bed, he wasn't certain, and he had no desire to imperil the success of his undertaking by undue precipitancy.

But though physically he lay inert, his mind was keenly, almost feverishly active. He had succeeded beyond his wildest hopes, but to insure the complete and utter downfall of the outlaws a lot of work and planning was still necessary. As soon as it seemed wise to leave the house he would, of course, recover the chestnut whom he had left in a remote thicket half a mile away. Then he would head straight for the Rafter M and take counsel with Doug Ballard.

"Oughta make it by daybreak, easy," he reflected. "That'll give us plenty of time to work things out right. It's gonna need considerable maneuverin' to land the whole gang of 'em good an' proper."

Restraining his impatience, he waited for a considerable time before he slowly raised himself and stepped cautiously over the leather couch. Since the echoes of the Lanarks' departing footfalls had died away, not a sound broke the intense stillness of the ranch house. Presently Tex ventured to light a match and looked at his watch.

"Eleven thirty," he murmured. "They shore must be in bed an' snorin' by this time."

Slowly and cautiously he felt his way across the room. Having passed a corner of the desk and circled a chair, he finally reached the door and felt about until his fingers touched and closed over the latch. For a moment he stood listening before he exerted a firm yet careful pressure on the strip of rough wrought iron.

The latch operated smoothly, but the door proved stubborn. Loudon exerted more pressure and then abruptly he drew a short, quick breath and his hand fell to his side. There had been a fatal sense of immovability about that rectangle of heavy planking which told him only too plainly that the door was locked!

For a space he stood motionless in the darkness. Then he moved back a foot or two and lit another match. The yellow flame flickered on tight-pressed lips, hard jaw, brow furrowed with lines of surprised perplexity.

He had not heard the key turn, yet there could be no question that Steve Lanark had locked the door on his departure. Could there be any special significance about the act, Tex wondered, as he moved swiftly and noiselessly across the room, or was it merely the old man's nightly habit to insure safety and privacy to the office and its contents?

At least the windows remained; and when Tex had carefully lifted the sash of the nearest one, he lit another match to find out without undue delay the location of the bolts or bars which fastened the iron shutters.

Then and only then did a full realization of his position come over him. The shutters were fastened by neither bolts nor bars. Instead, a stout hasp fitted over a massive iron staple, both riveted to the metal and held immovably together by a heavy and strong brass padlock.

For a second or two Loudon stared blankly at the device which had so unexpectedly turned the room into a prison. Then his chin went up and a dancing, dare-devil light flickered in his dark eyes.

"Talk about spider webs!" he muttered. "I'm shore meshed up in this one good an' proper!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

CLIPPED SECONDS.

FACING the east, the Hashknife ranch house managed in some curious fashion to retain much of its air of secretiveness and gloom in spite of the flood of early morning sunshine that bathed its somber front. The windows caught the slanting beams and flung back the reflection with a glittering defiance as if still bent on hiding what lay behind the glass. The closed iron shutters of that corner room seemed to give the whole front of the house a sinister, lopsided expression, like a blind man's patch.

In the room behind those shutters one might have thought it still dark night. Not a ray of light sifted between the well-fitting joints, and Loudon's watch was the only means he had of knowing that it was morning.

The time had not dragged as much as might have been supposed, for Tex, safe in the conviction that the household was in bed, had laid his coat across the bottom of the door in case of possible betraying cracks, lighted the lamp, and made a thorough, comprehensive examination of the room.

Save for several interesting memoranda in the desk concerning stock deals which he coolly pocketed, the result was negative. He failed to unearth a single key of any sort, nor did he come across a file or any other implement which would be of the least use in freeing himself. There followed a futile and exasperating half hour's juggling with the padlocks, from which he emerged with a broken knife blade and considerable irritation of mind. Having convinced himself that the door was hopeless, he stretched himself out on the couch about half past one and went to sleep.

For the past two hours, however, he had been wide awake and ready for what might come, keeping for the most part close to the door leading into the hall. This opened inward, and Loudon's plans as to what he meant to do when it did open depended very much on circumstances. In case both Lanarks came into the room together, complications of violence were apt to follow, which would vastly increase the hazard of his position. But when it came to that, no matter how one looked at it, the situation fairly bristled with difficulties and danger. And though Loudon's manner might seem cool and almost casual, he was fully alive to his peril.

Though he stood almost without moving a muscle, every sense was keenly alert. Fully half an hour before he had heard light footsteps in the hall, followed by the opening and closing of the door opposite. Less than five minutes ago a more heavy-footed person tramped briskly down the hall, a bolt clicked, and the front door slammed noisily. When for the third time Tex was conscious of some one in the passageway, his muscles tensed involuntarily; swiftly he drew his six-gun and, balancing his weight on the balls of his feet, stood waiting.

The footfalls paused just outside the door; there was a scarcely audible scrape of a key turning in a well-oiled lock, the sharper click of the latch, and abruptly the door swung inward.

What made him suddenly change his plan, Tex did not quite know. The Colt, gripped in his muscular fingers, was lifted ready to fall crushingly on the head of the man who entered. But instead, Loudon's arm grew rigid, and as the door moved inward he kept pace with it, sliding noiselessly into a little angle made by two walls, sheltered by the heavy planking.

From that corner Tex had a vague glimpse of a hawklike profile as Steve Lanark passed him. Very little light penetrated from the shadowy hall, but his sense of hearing told him that the old man was making straight for the front window. Tex heard the jingling

of a bunch of keys and then, under cover of the creaking of the lifting sash, he swung himself around the ledge of the door with amazing agility and slid into the hall without a sound. Softly opening the front door, he stepped out, drew it almost but not quite shut behind him, and, blinking in the bright sunlight, turned and sped straight past the office window a scant second before the iron shutters were pushed open from within.

There was no time to see if he was observed—no time indeed to think of anything but flight. Ducking around the corner, Tex cut across the angle made by the adobe wing, which was set back a little from the main building, and there halted, body pressed close to the wall, breath coming a little quickly, an eager, reckless light dancing and flickering in his dark eyes.

The wing was used as a sort of storehouse, and as he crouched in the shelter of the rough, colorful wall, Loudon's glance critically swept the three hundred feet of open which separated it from the massed feathery green of the tamarack thicket.

Wrapped in dusky, illusive shadows, it had been a simple thing to negotiate the night before. Bathed in brilliant morning sunshine it was altogether another matter.

But it had to be done, and Loudon was not thinking of the danger. He was waiting, listening, calculating his chances, striving to keep in mind every little risk he must take into consideration, for that unexpected escape from the ranch house had revived his hopes, made him realize that with care he still had a good chance of getting away without any one even suspecting his presence at that illuminating conference.

As he heard the iron shutters of the second window clang back, he recalled the position of Steve Lanark's desk and realized that unless the old man deliberately remained standing at the window, it was impossible for him to overlook the open space Tex had to cross. Nor was this visible from the more distant bunk house save, perhaps, for the last dozen feet. Any one looking down from the second floor would, of course, have a clear view of the entire stretch; but at this hour the chances of any of the family lingering up there was sufficiently remote.

Except, perhaps, Eve Lanark. Tex thought of her when he was halfway across the open, moving toward the tamaracks at a swift yet not precipitate walk. To run would attract instant attention to him even from a distance; whereas a man moving at ordinary speed even in an unusual direction might cause curiosity, but no immediate action.

So Tex proceeded at a walk, praying devoutly that Miss Lanark was either still in bed or had descended for breakfast. When the feathery branches of the tamaracks closed about him, he breathed a faint sigh of relief and pushed on more rapidly through the covert. He found the chestnut where he had tied him, and, mounting, rode on in the only safe direction that remained open.

He was thankful beyond expression that he had failed to find a file last night or been able to force one of the locks. In either case he would have escaped the sooner, but the evidence of his presence in the office must have warned the Lanarks that their plans had been discovered, and caused them to form fresh ones or abandon the holdup altogether. Now, happily oblivious, they would proceed with their arrangements and walk straight into a trap.

Loudon's intention was to circle through sheltered ways back to that trail leading past the dead pine along which he had first traveled to the Hashknife. In spite of the delay caused by his detention, he felt that with swift action, once he reached the Rafter M, things would work out more or less as

he had planned. Nevertheless, he chafed a little at the delay caused by the necessity to gain safely the trail leading eastward into the basin—to ride for several miles in the direction one would take to reach Lost Spring Camp. Remembering Steve Lanark's inquiry for Mogridge, the puncher he was supposed to have sent into headquarters, Tex was also fully alive to the chances of running into or being overtaken by some messenger dispatched for the same purpose.

With this in mind he rode warily, constantly on the alert for the slightest suspicious sight or sound. The country was rough and broken, the slopes and ridges sliced by frequent gullies, and dotted by many thickets and clumps of trees, all of which afforded excellent shelter. At the sound of an approaching horse there would be ample time to slip into one of these covers until the danger had passed. What Loudon did not count on was to come suddenly and unexpectedly upon some one whose lack of movement had quite failed to give him warning.

When he made an abrupt turn around a steep, chaotic mass of piled rock and saw a scant ten yards distant a riderless horse standing near the brink of a precipitous gully, he jerked his own mount to an instant halt, his hand dropping swiftly to his side. A second later a figure which had been momentarily obscured by the black stallion, moved suddenly and, turning, regarded him in surprise across her saddle.

It was Eve Lanark.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE VOICE OF DOOM.

"GOOD morning," she said quietly, a faint undercurrent almost of pleasure in her low, husky voice.

The instant she stirred, Loudon had recognized her and with lightning swiftness his face smoothed out, his hand flashed imperceptibly upward, the thumb hooking loosely in his belt. As he returned her greeting, he smiled.

"You're out early, ain't you?" he asked.

"Not very. I didn't sleep much and was up before sunrise." She moved around the black and stood facing him, a fleeting touch of weariness in her wonderful dark eyes. "I thought," she went on slowly, "that you had gone to Lost Spring Camp."

"That was yesterday," explained Loudon with entire composure. "To-day I'm just ridin' the range."

He hoped she wouldn't probe further, for one of the things Tex heartily disliked and endeavored always to avoid, was lying to a woman. He might have spared himself the anxiety, for Eve Lanark scarcely seemed to hear what he was saying. From under her long lashes she was regarding Loudon with a steady, curious speculation, almost an appraisement, which brought a faint touch of color into his face. For an instant he wondered whether she guessed something of how he had been occupied for the past twenty-four hours, but swiftly put the thought from him. Though her expression was difficult to read, at least there was no trace of accusation in it.

"Get down," she said at length, with something of her old imperiousness. "I want to talk to you."

Tex stared. "I haven't got an awful lot of time to spare," he countered dubiously.

"Piffle!" Her voice was mocking, and she made an imperative gesture with one hand. "I can't talk to you perched up like that. Don't be afraid; I shan't keep you long."

Though he chafed at the thought of even a short delay, Loudon did not deem it wise to protest further. Eve Lanark was still very much of an enigma to him. She always went armed and was reputed to be a dead shot. If he should

curtly deny her request and ride away, there was no telling what she might be moved to do.

To do him justice, however, that possibility did not greatly concern Loudon as he swung out of the saddle with a movement which brought the chestnut into the shadow of the great pile of rocks on his left. He was influenced partly by curiosity, but much more by a sudden, deep sympathy for the girl who would, he realized for the first time, inevitably be meshed in the counterplot he was preparing against her family. Though he had perceived that there was no love lost between them, they were her people and she could scarcely help sharing the disgrace of their exposure. He had a feeling that in spite of her surface hardness this was something she would feel keenly, and as he seated himself beside her on a flat boulder overlooking the deep, precipitous gulch that lay below them, Loudon's perplexity at her motive for stopping him was swept away by a sense of troubled regret, a keen yet rather hopeless desire that she should escape from it all. If only she could be induced to go back East. If only——"

"Well, what do you really think of us all?"

Startled for an instant out of his usually excellent self-control, Tex turned sharply to meet a mocking glance from her half veiled eyes that matched the scornful curve of the almost perfect lips.

"I don't quite get you," he drawled out, recovering himself swiftly.

Slowly she shook her head. "Oh, yes you do," she retorted lightly. "You know quite well what I mean. You see, my friend, you haven't deceived me. You're not at all what you pretend to be. I've watched you, and I know. You're playing a part. I don't know what your motive is, nor do I greatly care. But it occurs to me that it would be rather interesting to hear a decent man's opinion of—of the whole Hashknife crew."

Her face had not altered by a single curve or line. Her chin was tilted insolently, and the mocking expression still played about her eyes and mouth. But somehow Tex felt that underneath that careless mask, the girl was deeply moved.

"Whatever I may think about the outfit as a whole," he told her with conviction, "doesn't apply at all to you. You're certainly not—in that class."

"Why do you say that? What do you really know about me?"

"I know what I feel," he retorted. "You're different. I've more than half a notion that you're sick of life—this sort of life. I've often wondered why you stay here."

She gave him a strange look, and for the first time her steady glance wavered, and she turned her head to stare down into the gulch below them. Presently she reached out and plucked a bit of green stuff growing beside the boulder.

"I stay because I must," she said slowly, her eyes fixed on the green sprig she was absently picking to pieces. "My father forces me to spend at least two months each year at the Hashknife. It delights him to humiliate me. But that's cowardly!" Her voice rang sharply through the stillness. "There can't be any greater humiliation than to keep on taking his money knowing perfectly well where and how he gets it. If I had a spark of decency I'd long ago have broken away and set about earning my own living. At least the pittance I could make would be—clean. But I wasn't brought up that way. I demand too much of life. And so——"

Abruptly she broke off and faced him squarely, chin tilted, face set again in those insolent, sardonic lines. To Loudon, who guessed something of the gallant courage which kept that mask so constantly in place, there came a sudden rush of tribute and appreciation. His

lips parted swiftly, but she forestalled him.

"I'm not asking for your pity. I don't deserve it, and I don't want it. I'm only using you as a—a safety valve. That and because—well, let us say it is my whim that you should know a little more about me than—those others. Though after all I'm not so sure," she went on bitterly, "there wouldn't be more self-respect in going the whole way—in being what most people take me for, a conscienceless creature without a single scruple left. Then at least I'd be consistent."

"Couldn't you manage to break away from it for good?" asked Loudon swiftly. "I believe it wouldn't be half as hard doin' without things as you think. Anyhow, you wouldn't feel that every dollar you spent was——"

"Would—you take me away?" she interrupted in a queer, low tone. And then before he found breath to answer, she gave an odd little laugh. "Forgive me," she begged. "It's beastly of me to joke when you're so awfully decent and sympathetic. But most of the time I'm a rather beastly person." For an instant her eyes took on a curious, misty softness, her lips a tender curve which utterly transformed her.

"I've a feeling that I may take your advice, some day," she added, looking at him steadily. "When you're married to a nice girl, and that nice girl develops a foolish tantrum—they all do occasionally, you know—you can solace your masculine dignity with the reflection that once you did a very decent turn to a distinctly horrid person, and—there *is* a nice girl, isn't there?"

In spite of himself a slow flush crept into Loudon's face. Eve Lanark smiled.

"I knew it," she affirmed. "I can even guess who she is. You came here from the Rafter M, which isn't so many miles from the Lazy D. Am I getting warm?"

For an instant Loudon sat silent, returning her glance steadily, the flush still lingering in his handsome, sharp-cut face. Then he laughed.

"You're warm," he admitted frankly. "But just a little—previous."

"That means you—haven't spoken." Her long lashes drooped suddenly over her brilliant, searching eyes, and for just an instant she sat quite motionless. "She *is* a nice girl," she went on quietly. "I've watched her, and I——" She broke off abruptly and stared at Loudon, who had leaped suddenly to his feet and whirled to face the trail leading toward the Hashknife. As the clattering hoofbeats smote upon his senses, entirely without warning, so sharp and distinct that it seemed as if the next second would see the riders whirling around the end of the massed rocks, he recalled with a sickening sense of self-reproach that long stretch of sound-deadening sand which lay beyond the nearer rock bed. His own careless confidence was alone to blame. Not for an instant did it occur to him that the girl might be a Circe.

Swiftly his glance swept in the other direction where the trail, open and without shelter for half a mile at least, curved sharply along the edge of the almost impassable gulch. That way would be suicide; the gulch held just a slightly better chance. As he dove for the chestnut, he was aware of Eve Lanark standing by, regarding him composedly, an odd, cryptic questioning in her steady, level eyes. There was no time for even a word. He managed to reach his horse and grasp bridle reins and saddle horn with one swift movement. But before he could fling himself into the saddle the voice of Steve Lanark, hoarse with fury, ripped out a curt and urgent command:

"Stick 'em up, you dirty spy! I got you covered."

A slantwise glance showed Loudon the futility of disobedience and at the same time proved enlightening. Five or

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six weapons were leveled steadily at him. Roth was not present, but among the outlaws crowding the narrow trail, Tex recognized the face of Peaches Mason, whom he had tricked, as he thought, so cleverly that day at Ellensville.

"Not so awful clever as you thought for," he reflected grimly, thrusting both hands skyward.

With his lightning ability at the draw he had a feeling that he could have shot down Steve Lanark and perhaps one other before succumbing himself. But though he realized the utter hopelessness of his position, he could not bring himself to kill the outlaw in his daughter's presence.

"Stay that way," warned Lanark harshly. "Take his gun, Eve."

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

POPPY-EATING DEER

A WESTERN school-teacher who returned some time ago from her vacation spent in the Canadian Rockies, brings back an interesting story about the wild deer she saw on the shores of Lake Louise. Acres of Iceland poppies dot the shores of this beautiful lake—yellow, orange, and white blossoms. Years ago they were planted by the Canadian Pacific Railroad, with no thought that they would prove a great success. The poppies, however, made good in their new setting and soon spread along the shores of the lake into the adjoining forest. Now there are millions of these flowers, and they blossom all through the summer, adding a touch of color to the jade-green water.

In the late spring the deer are attracted to the shores of Lake Louise because the poppies are the first green things to appear. The Canadian mule deer make a hearty meal of the first green shoots. The second growth is too bitter for the deer, and they turn to other vegetation.

HILL-CLIMBING TROUT

SOME months ago J. M. Gibson of Montreal was crossing Simpson's Pass near Banff, Alberta, when he came to a brook about two feet wide at an altitude of nearly two miles. He asked his guide if there were any chance of getting a fish here. The guide shook his head. Gibson, unconvinced, dropped his lure into the tiny stream, and in a few minutes a two-pound steel-head trout was flopping about the feet of the guide. How could a fish make its way up an altitude of eight thousand feet?

Six varieties of game fish have their habitat in the vast park region of which Banff is the capital. In Lake Minnewanka, eight miles from Banff, lake trout weighing forty pounds have been taken by trolling. The lake is surrounded by mile-high mountains.

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Waterproofing Hemp Lariats

By Charles H. Coe

Author of "How to Make and Throw a Lariat."

USERS of the lariat detest a wet rope, knowing from experience that successful throws with one cannot be expected. Many try to render it waterproof by greasing or soaking in oil, which partially answers the purpose. But this treatment has at least two objections—it gathers much dirt and grit, therefore adding to the weight of the rope, and it still has a tendency to kink.

The writer has experimented with various preparations for waterproofing lariats, which resulted in the discovery some years since of an ideal formula for this purpose. So far as he can learn, the mixture had never theretofore been used. He urges cowboys to give it a trial, believing they will be more than pleased.

The ingredients consist of one gallon of gasoline, one pound of paraffin or parowax, and four ounces of melted vaseline. The manner of preparing is as follows: Put the gasoline in a tub—metal if possible—and place outdoors to warm in bright sunshine. Place the paraffin and vaseline in a covered kettle or spider, cutting the former into small pieces so it will melt easily. A fire outdoors will do, or the top of a stove. When melted and hot, take it outdoors and pour it directly into the warm gasoline, stirring briskly for a few moments.

Have your lariat warm and dry and as clean as possible. If it is very greasy, boiling in water for a few minutes would be advisable. When dry, immerse in the mixture by coiling flat, lifting and turning it over and swashing it about. After a thorough soaking, remove and stretch moderately between posts or trees, in the sun, and leave it thus for several hours. The gasoline carries the other ingredients to every part and fiber of the rope, itself finally evaporating, and waterproofing the rope to such an extent that it may be soaked in water for twenty-four hours or longer without becoming wet.

Going over the lariat occasionally with a little vaseline will keep it slick and in good condition. If it is a little stiff on a cool mornng, whipping a post or tree with the coils will limber it, and use will keep it so. This formula will not injure a rope in the least; on the contrary, it will rejuvenate a very old and limp rope.

Of course, a new rope should be stretched well, or better still, be trailed behind a horse or wagon until it is limber and free from kinks, before waterproofing. After a little use, a lariat waterproofed by this process is ideal for summer work, but it would be far too stiff for cold weather. For winter use, a smaller quantity of paraffin—say, not over one-fourth pound—and a much larger quantity of vaseline should be used, to the gallon of gasoline. And it would be absolutely necessary to treat this lariat for winter use while the weather was warm, or in a warm room in which there was no blaze or light to ignite the gasoline or its fumes. Otherwise, the solution would become mushy

or congealed, and it would not enter the fiber of the rope.

Now, a few words of caution: The gasoline must *never* be placed on a stove or over a light to warm. It must *never* come near a flame of any kind. A lighted match or flame must not be held near the rope after it has been treated and before the gasoline has entirely evaporated. Do not attempt to light a pipe or cigarette while the hands—or gloves, if used—are moist with the solution. The paraffin might ignite if it was overheated; therefore it is best to allow no flame to get to it while heating. With these precautions very strictly observed, the process is quite simple and harmless.

A BUNGALOW HOLLOWED FROM A LOG

SOME time ago there was exhibited at the Vancouver fair a bungalow constructed from a single log. The house was designed and built by C. E. Cave of Everett. The bungalow is complete in every detail, with shower bath, electric-light fixtures, and a double and single bed arrangement. The tree from which the cabin was constructed was purchased at the English Logging Company's camp and measured thirteen feet in diameter, the top of the log being sixty-four feet from the ground.

The log was hollowed out by means of drills and saws and is now three and one half inches thick. All the interior is finished in cabinet work. Enough lumber was taken from the big Douglas fir to build two ordinary houses and three bungalows, the log scaling eleven thousand feet of lumber.

GLACIER SLIPS DOWN THE SIDE OF MOUNT SHASTA

DURING the latter part of September, the Mount Shasta Glacier was dislodged by the long-continued drought and warm weather and slipped from its ancient resting place on the north side of the mountain. Newspaper reports stated that it was moving down the slope at the rate of five miles an hour, snapping off big trees in its path and thrusting immense boulders before it.

The movement began shortly after dawn, and at noon the huge mass of ice was well within the timber line. Great clouds of vapor rose, as the moraines of the glacier were broken up by its movement. The journey of the glacier was seen from a distance of twenty miles. It was accompanied by a distinct roar, which was heard over a considerable distance of the surrounding country.

The Round-Up

BUCKLEY gets lots of letters from readers who are interested in guns. We are going to read you two, and Buckley's replies to them, as they are of such general interest. We know they are of general interest, as all letters to Buckley first pass through our hands, and many of them have asked the questions put by R. E. Ford, of Shidler, Oklahoma, and Horace Ainscough, Lionkol, Wyoming.

We'll lead off with Friend Ford:

"DEAR BOSS: I was reading the Round-up, and ran on to the article on guns by Buckley. That sure was a crackajack. Now, if we could just get one like that every week on some of the various subjects that we all are interested in, it would be simply great. For instance, trout fishing, shooting different kinds of game, coon hunting; these are a few I can mention readily. I have missed only one issue of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE in three years, and I missed that one because they were all sold out for seventy-five miles around. I am inclosing stamped envelope, as I would like Buckley to send me full information about how to join the National Rifle Association, and whether or not one has to be a member to buy those Russian rifles and ammunition that Buckley mentions. I sure would like to get one. This is fairly open country here, and while not the wild, wild West, it is some considerable rough. There is a town ten miles from here. We have pistol battles on the streets and open gambling. Our two banks have been robbed three times in the past year. But we read of so many murders in the big cities that we wonder how persons can be so wicked."

This is what Buckley has to say in reply.

"DEAR MR. FORD: The Boss of the Round-up has handed your letter to me, so that I may tell you how to join the National Rifle Association. One must be a member, by law, to buy the government supplies offered at cost. Membership costs two dollars a year. The first step, however, is to write to the secretary, 1108 Woodward Building, Washington, D. C., asking for application blanks. Full information as to procedure will be sent with the blanks.

"I don't know how the supplies of Russian rifles and ammunition are holding out. Quantities have recently been sold to the Mexican government."

Now for the letter from Ainscough:

"DEAR BOSS: I see in the Round-up section of good old W. S. M., an article by Buckley about rifles. He mentioned the Lee Enfield Mark III, Star 303, British, and that they had been issued by the National Rifle Association at ten dollars each. Now, boss, I was just wondering if this was the same rifle I had been used to in the British army in 1905.

"If the gun mentioned is the one I refer to having used in the British army, will you please put me in touch with where I could buy one of them. I hunt big game every winter, and carry a rifle all summer when fishing, as we meet bear at all seasons.

"I have been a reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for years, and I think it the best magazine I ever read. This, by the way, is also how the whole family feels about it. And when one can get a whole family to agree on one subject, I'll say that certainly is going some."

Mr. Author-Man Buckley, he up with his typewriter and shoots back as follows:

"DEAR MR. AINSCOUGH: Yes, the Lee-Enfield Mark III* is essentially the same rifle that you used in the British army in 1905, though it has been 'improved' since then—by having the magazine cut-off, the rear-sight wind gauge, and the fine-adjustment screw removed. The aperture sight which doubtless you remember on the left side of the rear of the stock, and the corresponding dial-sight by the lower band, have also been abolished; not that they were ever any use to anybody anyway.

"For target shooting, the rifle is not now as good as it was when you knew it; but for hunting, it's a wonderful weapon; I've handled sporting rifles of all kinds and prices, and have never found one, for general use, better than the short L. E. as issued.

"I don't know whether the National Rifle Association, 1108 Woodward Building, Washington, D. C., has any more of these arms; you would have to be a member—two dollars per year—to buy one. I believe they still have the pointed Mark VII ammunition, at eight dollars a thousand. You might write to the secretary, inquiring.

"If unsuccessful there, a good idea would be to get *The American Rifleman,* which is the N. R. A.'s official publication. It is full of advertisements of rifles for sale; and I have seen several L. E.'s listed in it lately."

Seein' as how Buck has the floor, or, rightly, we should say, grass, and seein' as how Buck is all wound up and het up on this here favorite subject of his, guns, and seein' as how he has somethin' he most particular wants to get offa his chest, we're goin' to let him keep goin'—with you-all's permission—for one more lap.

So, Buck, old boy, take aim, *and fire,* but don't shoot to kill!

"MY DEAR BOSS: Some words to you and all the folks at the Round-up:

"There's a chap in this week's issue—'Texas Frank' Benton, now of the Bronx, whom I'd write to if I had his address—who remarks that Bill Garfield was seventy-seven in one story, and a bare seventy-three in the yarn following. Well, sir, boss, these stories of Bill's are supposed to have been written for the local weekly newspaper, the Gold Creek *Bugle,* and to be extracted from the files of that remarkable journal; so let's suppose that I extracted 'em a lit-

THE LAST ROUND-UP

By Rulon D. Rushton

At last, Old Faithful, we must part,
And though it nearly breaks my heart,
I must release yer from this pain.
This deed sure goes against my grain.
Accursed is the prairie dog,
That dug his hole near yonder log,
Causing yer, so frisky and free,
To double up and break yer knee.

Oh, had we gone some other way,
We'd have been spared this fateful day!
I can see the pain in yer eye,
And I kinder would like to cry;
But this is no time to shed tears,
When busy rounding up the steers;
The time is pressing, I must go
And help the boys the brutes to throw.

Dear Heav'n, this is too much for me!
Could you but my emotions see,
Yer'd know my heart was aching like,
To see yer leg once more a-right.
We have been pals since first we met,
And when yer gone I'll not forget,
Though yer old carcass fades away,
Under nature's unfailing sway.

Many a time you've brought me home,
When I was lost and all alone.
The best uv friends do hev ter part,
But the killin' jest breaks my heart.
I could drop an Injun with ease;
Or swing a Mex from yonder trees;
Could shoot a rustler on the spot,
Fer many battles I have fought.

But now I weaken at the task,
Yet there is nobody I could ask
To perpetrate this deed of shame,
And end your chance of future fame.
The more I wait the worse I feel;
It makes my very senses reel,
With fearful watching fer the end,
That you to oblivion will send.

There—I have killed him! Dear old steed,
From earthly troubles you are freed.
No more round-ups shall feel yer force,
So good-by, bronc—you dear old horse.
It is awful to watch yer die;
To see yer plunge and bat yer eye.
And now Death has his victory won,
Away—away from here I'll run.

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE:

Fortune's Christmas

By MAX BRAND

Here's the story of a miser who makes up for all of his lost Christmases in one year.

GRIZZLY GALLAGHER, SANTA CLAUS

By REGINALD C. BARKER

After standing off a pack of wolves, who wouldn't appreciate seeing Santa Claus once more!

OTHER GOOD STORIES BE SURE TO ORDER YOUR COPY IN ADVANCE

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

WITH the great day not a fortnight away, it isn't too early to begin making Christmas plans, is it, Gangsters? Cheer dispensers all the year, this is the season when we're especially anxious to bring comfort and a ray of sunshine to those who are shut in, to those who are in hospitals and sanitariums. Most of us know of at least one such person. A cheery Christmas letter or even a card decorated with holly will make his yuletide and yours a happier one.

A message from the cold northland.

DEAR GANG: I have spent the last eight years in all parts of Alaska, from Point Barrow to southeastern Alaska on the coast, and from Seward to Fairbanks going inland. So you see, I have seen a great deal of our north country. I came from Virginia, where my home is, and have never been back since, as I am very fond of this great out-of-doors land.

I have hunted the moose, sheep, bear, and other game, and as for fishing, there is no place that may compare with that of here.

Over the snow behind a dozen Huskies, down the mountains on ski or snowshoe, one finds thrills every day.

I would appreciate letters, and will gladly answer questions concerning Alaska.

MILTON NOLL.

Box 1043, Seward, Alaska.

Wanted: a baby.

DEAR HOLLOW TREE: I have been wondering if there isn't some one in The Gang that has a baby girl whom they would like to have reared with every advantage of a good home and plenty, but can't afford it. I want just such a baby not less than six months nor more than two years old. I will adopt it outright or take it with the privilege of letting the parent see it at least once a year. What could be more fair? We have no children and can give the best of references.

MRS. E. E. A.

Care of The Tree.

Greetings from England.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a shorthand typist working in London near the famous law courts in the Strand. I should very much like to hear from some Gangsters in the West on farms, and also from some New York typists. I'll be only too willing to tell them as much as I know about London and Croydon or Canterbury and send them views.

I am twenty-two years old and live with my sister and aunt; my parents are dead,

and my only brother was killed in the war. I live near the Aërodrome and saw the American World Flyers and gave them a yell.

I am very fond of outdoor life and sports, but unfortunately my health is not very good this year, and I have had to cut out sports, with the exception of cycling. My chief sports are net ball and hockey.

If The Gang will write me I'll write to them jolly quick. I have a friend who left England last year for Tampa, and I'm going to write him and tell him to join The Gang. MOLLY FOLEY.

2 Napier Road, South Croydon, Surrey, England.

"I have traveled all my life. My father is a mining man, and I spend my summers with him at the mines. So if any one is interested in mining or any kind of Western life, ask me," writes Betty Grey, Box 1454, Missoula, Montana.

Bay State, care of The Tree, wants to hear from amateur photographers in Connecticut.

Le Roy V. Pfeifer, 1014 Russell Street, Baltimore, Maryland, says he'll correspond with and exchange views with any one, young or old, sick or well.

Another Baltimore brother, Raymond E. Barthgate, 631 West Hamburg Street, that city, complains that he is slighted by the mailman.

E. R. Winn, 420 E Street, Salt Lake City, Utah, would be glad to hear from Gangsters about their home towns, and in return will give information about Salt Lake City. He's interested in electrical engineering, outdoor sports, and checkers.

A seagoing Gangster asks for letters, and promises to send views of the different places at which his ship stops. Address Nautical, care of The Tree, fellows.

Frenchy, care of The Tree, who is nineteen, and lives in the oil fields of Wyoming, earning her own living, says she gets lonely. She volunteers information about Montana and Wyoming. "Be true and shoot square" is her creed.

J. A. Severy, Box 187, Florida City, Florida, would like to hear from shoemakers throughout the country. Can any one give him first-hand information about conditions and chances in the South Seas?

A Christmas gift that is sure to please—the Hollow Tree badge.

Twenty-five cents in stamps or coin sent to the Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, will bring you either the button style to be worn on the coat lapel, or the pin. In ordering be sure to state which you wish.

Sixteen-year-old sisters from East, West, North, and South, your letters will be gratefully received and promptly answered by Leita Appleberry, 1403 Church Street, Wilmington, North Carolina.

Here's another volunteerer of information about California: H. Johnson, P. O. Box 561, Palo Alto, California.

A son of Erin hails us.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm working in the gold mines up here in northern Ontario. A letter from anywhere will be very welcome, and especially from the Southern States, as I have a great liking for that part of this continent, although I've never been there—or one from Hamilton, Ontario, where I lived for three years.

I'm interested in most everything that interests The Gang. As my name indicates I hail from the Emerald Isle. If any one could send me the words of a poem entitled "Down in Texas by the Rio Grande" I could send poems of Alaska and the Yukon. PAT J. PHILLIPS.

Box 1344, Timmins, Canada.

This rolling stone rolled right up to the Holla.

DEAR FRIENDS: I have had nearly every sort of job in the open spaces from cowpuncher to fire chief, from miner to lumberjack. I've spent three years with the

Fourteenth United States Cavalry on the Mexican border.

I'm a genuine rolling stone, have never stayed in one place longer than six months since 1910. At present I am a seaman, but because I'm a blue-water sailor does not mean that I have forgotten the beautiful forests, wide prairies, open range and desert, and when it comes to loving and respecting a horse I am hard to beat. I hope to hear from some of The Gang.

ROLLING STONE.

Care of The Tree.

Some cheery letters needed here, sisters.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My husband is a foreman for the Western Union Telegraph Company and we live in camp cars, containing bath, gas lights, arcola heaters, a large dining room, kitchen, refrigerator, store room and washroom, office, and about eight closets. We move from town to town, and I'm often very lonely, as I have never been able to meet many people, owing to the short time we stay in one place.

I have been in New Hampshire around the Lost River Reservation and all through the White Mountains, also to Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and now we are in Maine only about thirty miles from Bar Harbor.

If any one would like to write me I shall be glad to send views of each town we go through and will be very prompt in answering. One little knows how lonely it can be to find oneself away from home with no one to talk to all day.

MRS. W. E. HAVEY.

Care of The Tree.

Robert Ja Rue, 1759 West Fourteenth Street, Chicago, Illinois, says he'd like to hear from some of the young "tallow-pots" from various railroads outside of Chicago, telling of conditions there. This Gangster has lots of reading matter he'll be glad to give those who are sick and shut in.

A Southern brother, H. B. Eppes, 6403 Third Avenue South, Birmingham, Alabama, says he can't get too many letters, so fire away, Gang.

ALASKA PLANS TO TAG SALMON

FOR the first time in history the movements of salmon of various species from the North Pacific Ocean to their spawning grounds in the southeastern Alaska district will be chartered this summer. This announcement was made some time ago by Assistant Fisheries Agent E. M. Ball of Juneau. Five thousand salmon will be tagged, released, and a reward of fifty cents each offered for their return, with the information of how, when, and where captured. Fishermen now receive only twenty-five cents for a large salmon at fishing ports.

"RATTLESNAKE TREE"

SOME fifteen miles from Tucson, Arizona, on a southeast trail, there is an old thorn tree known as "rattlesnake tree." This ancient thorn, standing in the hot desert sands, surrounded by cactus, is festooned with the skins of rattlesnakes which have been killed in the vicinity. It is a custom, almost a law, for every one who kills a snake in this region to bring the skin and toss it as a trophy over the laden branches of the thorn. Tourists and travelers who go down this trail always stop to investigate the strange-looking old thorn and to inquire the meaning of the long strips which hang from its bows. Hundreds of trophies have been draped over the old tree, and it is literally covered with the skins of the dead snakes.

Where To Go and How To Get There

By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT

THE wonders of the West are many and varied. I do not believe that any country in the world offers such diversity of natural wonders, and this little corner section of northeastern Utah designated as the Dinosaur National Monument is in some respects the most remarkable of all. Here are to be found skeletons and remains of prehistoric animals which, but for these evidences of their existence, many of us would set down as the figments of overwrought brains.

This wonderful fossil field was discovered in 1909, by Professor Earl B. Douglass, of the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This organization and also the Smithsonian Institution and the University of Utah have continued the work of delving for the treasures to be found there. I don't know if readers of this magazine are interested in fossils. There is a prevailing impression that such things appeal only to long-whiskered professors; but to me this phase of our West is fraught with an atmosphere of almost uncanny impressiveness. As an instance of what I mean, I will cite the unearthing of the largest specimen known to science of the prehistoric monster called the brontosaurus. This immense creature of a past era has been reassembled and now stands in a museum in Pittsburgh. It is one hundred feet long and twenty feet high. Those in a position to make reliable calculations state that in life the creature probably weighed twenty tons. These dimensions dwarf the elephant—which we are accustomed to regard as the hugest of living animals—to pygmy proportions.

A visitor to this famous fossil bed will find the quarry where the delving is done on top of a sharp ridge between two gulches. It is the theory of most scientists who have studied the forma-

tions thereabouts that the dinosaurs, brontosaurus and other prehistoric animals must have floated down some long-lost river, from an unknown source, and become imbedded at this point in a sand bar. There they lay for millions of years until they became covered to a great depth in mud and sand. Then an upheaval of nature forced the fossil bed to an upright plane so that it formed an outcropping on the mountain tops.

The whole region in which these fossil remains occur is a wonder country of rugged, tumbled rock formations. From the quarry at the top of Dinosaur Peak, one looks over a vista of peaks and ridges and cañons, of rolling plains and bad lands, a wonderful mass of variegated color.

The nearest town to the Dinosaur National Monument is Jensen, Utah, lying on the Victory Highway, between Denver, Colorado, and Salt Lake City. The side trip from Jensen to Dinosaur Peak is only six miles, and it is well worth the trouble. I always think there is so much more satisfaction in viewing objects as they are found, instead of in museums. Somehow, the significance of these prehistoric remains comes home to one when they are seen out here in this geologic wonderland.

The nearest railroad point is Watson, Utah, on the Uintah Railroad, a narrow gauge line connecting with the main line of the Denver & Rio Grande Western at Mack, Colorado. An auto stage runs from Watson to Vernal, twelve miles to the westward of the monument. This is a region where rail development has made little progress.

A CALL FROM THE OPEN

DEAR MR. NORTH: No doubt a lot of your readers think the days of the open range and wild free country of the West are gone, but such is not the case. Just get a map of western Canada and run your finger tip a short distance from the American boundary, across the southern portion of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. Three or four hundred miles will take you practically out of civilization, as far as settlers are concerned, excepting a few along the river in that portion of Alberta and British Columbia known as the Valley of the Peace.

According to the government report, this valley alone contains approximately 115,762 square miles, of which a large portion is excellent farm land or could be used for ranching. Only a small portion of the surveyed land of this valley is occupied and most of the region is unsurveyed.

I have spent the last twenty years working on ranches part of my time, the rest as trapper and guide. This fall, I am going to settle down in one of the many places I know of in the North Country, where I can grow everything in the line of grain and the common vegetables, where I can let thousands of head of stock run for years—should I have them—on open range, and cut all the wild hay I need; where I can trap everything from weasel to grizzly, including mink, rat, beaver, fisher, fox, marten, lynx, coyote, wolf, and bear. I shall shoot my own meat at the time of year it won't spoil.

I expect to go several days' ride from the nearest settler and locate beside a stream, within riding distance of the mountains, where I can use a saddle horse most of the time to cover the trap line. I know where I can find many such places and would consider a pardner if he was a real man—one who don't know it all, but is willing to learn. He must be young and strong, easy to get along with, full of ambition, and willing to do his part without a murmur. He won't have to pack a large bank roll. Three hundred dollars, clear of train fare, would pay his share of expenses to start. I should be glad to help any one else who would care to locate near me. I will be pleased to hear from any person who is desirous of locating in this real West I have described. Good luck to you all, and to WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. BOB B.

Now then, you gents, who yearn for the open and the primordial, here is a chance. Don't write unless you are in earnest. Make the acquaintance of this kindly disposed hombre, if you are seriously interested in his offer, and inclose stamp for reply. Send letters in my care. I will forward them promptly.

MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

MANNING, VERA.—She was in St. Louis, Missouri, in November, 1918. Please write to G. T. A., care of this magazine.

PICKARD, ALONZO, and **ROGAN, PETER.**—Please get in touch with an old pal, who is trying to hear from you. Stanley H. Oliver, 58 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, Massachusetts.

SUGAR.—Please forgive me and send your address. I am well, but am worried about you. D. S. Harris, 130 East Montgomery Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

WEIR, JEAN.—She was a nurse in Wills' Eye Hospital, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1912. Any information as to her present location will be appreciated by Kay, care of this magazine.

WILLARD, CHARLES E.—He was living in Spokane, Washington, some time ago, but has not been heard of since. He is a salesman, seventy years of age, short and stocky, with brown eyes. His sister and mother would like to find him, and would be grateful for any news. E. Willard, care of this magazine.

HOOVER, JOSEPH M.—His home is at 104 Colletta Street, Danville, Illinois. He served in the Canadian army during the war, but was not seen for some time after his return. He is five feet nine inches in height, has light hair, blue eyes, weighs one hundred and eighty-five pounds, and is a bricklayer and plasterer by trade. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will kindly notify Hazel Fuller, 5816 Wakefield Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

WILL W.—Please send your address to Theodore, as he has news for you.

DeCOCQ, CHARLES A.—He is twenty-two years of age, six feet two inches in height, has black hair, brown eyes, a dark complexion, and was stopping in Kansas City, Missouri, on July 17, 1923. Please write to A. M. DeCocq, Frisco Yard Office, Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

CHALLAS, Mrs. ANNA.—She formerly lived in Newburgh, Ontario, Canada, but was last heard of in Rochester, New York. It is believed that she may have married again a man by the name of Harry Spicer, of Dunkirk, New York. She is requested to write, as she is needed to settle important business. Mrs. Edith Edwards, Chester Depot, Vermont.

NEWTON, LUCY CAROLINE.—Please write to your niece, who is very anxious to get in touch with you. Mrs. Thomas Edwards, Chester Depot, Vermont.

FINKLE, DORWOOD.—He is twenty-six years of age, short and stocky. He was on the U. S. S. "Georgia," and later in 1914 he went aboard the U. S. S. "Philadelphia." Any news of him will be gratefully received. F. Finkle, care of this magazine.

SHEEHAN, HAROLD DEWEY.—He is twenty-six years of age, five feet four inches in height, has black hair, brown eyes, one finger missing, and weighs one hundred and forty pounds. He was employed as a stock clerk at the Howard & Bullough's American Machine Company, Pawtucket, Rhode Island, on May 2, 1917. His mother is ill and needs his assistance. J. J. Sheehan, 23 Cottage Street, Newark, New Jersey.

LAW, EVERETT E.—He was living in Seattle, Washington, in 1921. He is thirty-five years of age, five feet six inches in height, has black hair and brown eyes. His cousin is eager to find him, and will be grateful for news. A. L. Hoult, R. F. D., Box 67, Moro, Oregon.

BROWN, JOSEPH BERTRAND.—He formerly lived in Wyoming. His wife is ill and needs his assistance. He is requested to go to Miss C.'s home, where she is staying, or communicate with her directly at R. A. Please send all information to R. A., care of this magazine.

LANSDOWN, BENNY.—He left Plymouth, Pennsylvania, for Sharon, Pennsylvania, in 1915. His old buddy would like to hear from him. Dave P. Colley, Box 554, Maricopa, California.

STOCKTON, FLOYD.—He is twenty-two years of age, and was last heard of in Texas. Any one knowing his present address will confer a favor by writing to Mrs. Ida Harp Stockton, 907½ Broadway, Mt. Vernon, Illinois.

JEWELL, DALLAS, of Minneapolis, Minnesota. He left his wife and child in March, 1923. Please return home at once, as you are needed. Beatrice.

BROOM, LEWIS E.—He is twenty-six years of age, five feet in height, has brown hair, gray eyes, and weighs one hundred and forty pounds. His family is very eager to hear from him. Mrs. M. A. Broom, 132 New Orleans Street, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

FENNELL, CARMODY SHANNON.—I was born on May 16, 1899, at 77 East Seneca Street, Buffalo, New York. About four weeks later I was received at St. Mary's Infant Asylum and Maternity Hospital. The records show that my father's name was James, and that my mother's was Margaret. I am now five feet five inches in height, have blue eyes, dark-chestnut hair, a ruddy complexion, and weigh one hundred and thirty-eight pounds. I am very anxious to find my parents and relatives. Please send all information to J. F., care of this magazine.

R. J. M.—It made me very happy to receive news from you and J. B. Please write me a long letter and let me know how both of you are getting along. I send you my love. Mother.

BRADFORD, MARY.—She is five feet nine inches in height, has brown eyes, dark-brown hair, and was last heard of in May, 1924, in Jefferson City, Missouri. Please send all helpful information to Clifford Brown, 134 Court Street, Binghamton, New York.

SHARA, Mrs. CATHERINE.—She formerly lived in Chicago, Illinois, but later went to Los Angeles, California. A friend is very eager to find her, and will welcome any information concerning her. C. R. Warren, 511 West St. Clair Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

PEASE, TEDDY.—I am heartbroken over your departure. Please forgive me, and write as soon as you see this. Julia, care of this magazine.

HOWARD, WILLIAM T.—He is fifty-four years of age, five feet seven inches in height, has dark hair, blue eyes, a dark complexion, and two front teeth missing. He left his home on July 22, 1924, to go to Fort Worth, Texas. His family is very anxious for him, and would be grateful for any news. Mrs. W. J. Howard, Box 238, Walnut Springs, Texas.

THOMAS, NORMAN.—He left his home in Toronto, Canada, on April 26, 1924. Please notify D. Davidson, 100 Bloor Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

STANLEY.—I have been with your sister and the rest of the folks. We understand everything now, and I am still trusting and waiting for you. Please come at once or write. Your old pal, Helen.

HAMMONS, JAMES D.—He is twenty-seven years of age, has dark hair, blue eyes, weighs one hundred and forty-seven pounds, and was last heard of in 1916, in Berryville, Arkansas. His brother will appreciate his present whereabouts. Samuel B. Hammons, Company F, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Hawaii.

ROGERS, CHARLIE J.—He is of medium size, twenty-four years of age, with gray eyes, blond hair, and a fair complexion. He formerly came from Torrent, Kentucky. His wife is very anxious to get in touch with him, and would appreciate helpful information. O. B., care of this magazine.

CLAY, HOWARD.—Please communicate with me at once, as I have important news for you. Beatrice.

DEMECSKI, STANLEY and **JOHN.**—Stanley was last seen in Allentown, Pennsylvania, while John was living in Baltimore, Maryland, some time ago. Please write to your sister, as she has a message from father and Will. Mrs. Fannie Schroeder, 2189 Carabel Avenue, Lakewood, Ohio.

BARRY, WILLIAM D.—Please let me know where you are, as I am very eager to get in touch with you. Mother.

HARVEY, HARRY B.—He was a cook for the Erie Railroad boarding house on Greene Street, Paterson, New Jersey, and was living on Willoughby Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. He is forty-two years of age. Any one having his present address will kindly notify L. C. Schultz, 65 Pearl Street, Paterson, New Jersey.

McGRATH, ELIZABETH.—She formerly lived at St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada, but was last seen in Lancaster, New York, in 1912. Kindly write to Elmer A. Adolf, Lancaster, New York.

HARRIS, DAVE.—I have good news for you. Please communicate with me through the "Billboard," 1493-1505 Broadway, New York City, or in care of the De France Hotel, 142 Forty-ninth Street, New York City. Clara Jones.

SULLIVAN, JESSE E.—He was with the U. S. marines in May, 1914, was later married in Brooklyn, New York, and was last heard of in Havana, Cuba. He is five feet nine inches in height, with dark hair and complexion. Your father would like to hear from you. Gus Sullivan, 1015 Ninth Street, Denver, Colorado.

A. P. T.—Please return home, as we all love you, and Buddy asks for you daily. R. H. T.

DAVIS, LOCK C.—He was living in Blackman, Florida, in 1912. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Annie Dawkins, 108 Everett Street, Burlington, North Carolina.

GRAY, JOHN.—I love you as much as ever, and am very eager to hear from you. Please write to the same address. Rose.

AXEL.—Please come back to me, as I am lonesome and need you. No one is going to hurt you. Your wife.

STONE, GEORGE E.—He lived at 101 Capital Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia, and during the years 1908 to 1912 he served in the Quartermaster Corps, at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. A very dear friend is most anxious to find him, and will be grateful for news. M. E., care of this magazine.

BAIRD, BEATRICE, and **O'CONNOR, MARGARET.**—Beatrice formerly lived in Oak Park, Illinois, and Margaret had her home in South Central Park Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. An old friend would like to hear from them. D. P., care of this magazine.

TED, C.—Please write to me at once and let me know where you are. Mae, Hotel Felix, 1242 Market Street, San Francisco, California.

SPEECHMAN, F.—Please communicate with me immediately, as I am anxious for you. Orville R. Schafer, care of this magazine.

GOLDMAN, BESSIE.—She is nineteen years of age, five feet seven inches in height, has light hair, blue eyes, and left her home about a year ago. Her heartbroken mother will forgive her if she will only return home or write to Mrs. B. Goldman, 670 Broadway, Brooklyn, New York.

LINAKES, CHARLES.—He was with Billy Clark's Broadway Show some time ago, but he was last heard of in Frankfort, Kentucky. Please get in touch with Lillian T., 1010 West Seventeenth Street, Bedford, Indiana.

PRESS, JOSEPH H.—He is a piano player and supposed to be living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Please communicate with Marguerite Breer, care of this magazine.

OSBORNE, HARRY.—Please return home, as I am worried about you. I will try to please you, and will not ask you to give up your way of living. Write me at once, as I have some news for you. Sadie Osborne, Sunnyside, Washington.

WITHERALL, FRANK.—He is six feet two inches in height, has a light complexion, a scar on his chin, and weighs two hundred and thirty pounds. His wife would like to find him, and would be grateful for any information concerning him. Mrs. Rose Witherall, 54 Tremont Street, Charlestown, Massachusetts.

BENNETT, G., or McCOE, Mrs. JOHN.—Please write to your sister, Lillian, who is now married. Mrs. Francis D. Crary, 119 East Chestnut Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

LENNON, PEARL, or BEAVER, Mrs. D.—She was last heard of in Los Angeles, California. Please write to your sister, Lillian, who is now married. Mrs. Francis D. Crary, 113 East Chestnut Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

LENORE, G., or WAYNE, LOUISE B.—She left Kentucky for Windsor, Ontario, Canada, in 1916. Please write to your sister, Lillian. Mrs. Francis D. Crary, 113 Chestnut Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

McCLENDON.—I would like to hear from the relatives of Savannah McClendon. She married Robert Wilkey, at Tyler, Texas, on March 13, 1891. Any information will be appreciated by her son, Ben Wilkey, 509 East Third Street, Austin, Texas.

EDWARDS, LEON D.—He is twenty-seven years of age, five feet eleven inches in height, has brown hair and eyes, and a dark complexion. He served overseas in the Fifth Division, Sixtieth Infantry, and was living at 1710 Thames Street, Baltimore, Maryland. Please notify her sister, Mrs. Florence Swanson, 420 St. James Place, Chicago, Illinois.

REYNOLDS, WILLARD W. and **ROBERT E.**—Willard was in Waco, Texas, getting ready to sail with the Hospital Corps of the World War. Robert was living in Sheldon, Iowa, in 1910. His sister would like to find them, and would welcome news concerning them. Mildred E. Reynolds, 261 East K Street, Casper, Wyoming.

BODAH.—Please get in touch with your family, who is anxious to see you again. Alphonsine Bodah, Shirley, Massachusetts.

MacDONALD, THOMAS WILLIAM.—He was born in Alexandria, Ontario, Canada, about sixty-nine years ago, but was last heard of in Minnesota. His sister would like his present address. Mrs. Jane A. Hallicy, 711 California Street, Huntington Beach, California.

GLOVER, L. GORDON.—He was born on November 24, 1891, in Missouri, and was later adopted by a family named Bowlin. Shortly afterward he was taken to Nebraska, and has not been heard of since. His brothers and sister are very eager to see him again. Golder E. Glover, 4039 Olive Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

HOLLAND, J. H.—He left Birmingham, Alabama, in July, 1894, and is now fifty-seven years of age. Please communicate with his sister, Mrs. M. L. Harrell, General Delivery, Birmingham, Alabama.

JONES, JOHN E.—Please write to your daughter, who is ill and needs your assistance. Mrs. Lee E. Pierce, Lenapah, Oklahoma.

SPRENKLE or **GLOMBIS, HELENE,** of North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is eighteen years of age, five feet in height, and has a dark pennant tattooed on her left shoulder. Any one knowing her present address will confer a favor by writing to J. Smiley, care of this magazine.

HERRICK, THOMAS SCOTT.—He was in Michigan in 1916. His daughter has been searching for him for some time, and would welcome any helpful news. E. H., care of this magazine.

BEERS, A.—Please let me know what I can do to help you. My time and money are at your disposal. Harry Peters.

L. J. H.—Please forget what happened on July 27th and let me hear from you, as I am heartbroken and still love you. Your wife.

CARTER, MORRIS JAKE.—I would like to get in touch with my husband, whom I lost track of at the time I was to meet him in Los Angeles, California. He is five feet six inches in height, has brown eyes, black hair, and a scar on the back of his head. Any information concerning him or his folks will be greatly appreciated. Mrs. M. J. Carter, 565 Forty-second Street, Oakland, California.

THIBODEAUX, Mr. and **Mrs. JOE.**—They were in Memphis, Tennessee, some time ago, but have not been heard of since. Please send your present address to Henry J. Hargis, 513 Olivier Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.

CHRISTIANSEN, CHRIST.—He is forty-six years of age, six feet in height, has dark-brown hair, and formerly lived in Port Clinton, Ohio. He left for the Alaska gold mines in 1898, but was seen in Seattle, Washington, in 1902. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will kindly notify Mrs. Mary Smith, 2142 West Sixty-first Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

BERKHALT, BERT.—He was working in the oil fields in Kansas. An old friend is very eager to get in touch with him, and would be grateful for information. Mrs. Nancy J. Berry, Fifth Avenue Hotel, Pueblo, Colorado.

SEXTON, ANNIE.—Please communicate with me, as I am very anxious to see you. J. C., care of this magazine.

CLAYTON, WALTER.—He was a member of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. Any information will be appreciated by his brother, Edwin Clayton, 1837 Johnson Avenue, San Luis Obispo, California.

HEARNS, JOHN.—Your brother is worried and would like to hear from you. Kindly notify Willie J. Hearns, Spring Grove, Minnesota.

BRUMBY, GEORGE and **EDWARD.**—They are supposed to be living in California. Their cousin, Almina Weaver, who is now married, would like to hear from them. Mrs. M. A. Crawford, 984 South Normandie Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

KIMBALL, JOHN.—He left Michigan forty years ago to go to California. His cousin would like to find him. M. A. Crawford, 984 South Normandie Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

BRADLEY, JOHN ROBERT.—His mother has not seen him for seven years, and is very eager to find him. Please help her by sending any news to Mrs. Annie Bradley, 1825 Metropolitan Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

CHUGGIE.—I can't believe that you are married. Please write to me at the same address. Bill B.

McCREADY, WILL J.—Please write to Caledonia and let us know if he is well. We are holding some of his personal belongings. Charlie died a few days after we left the country. A friend.

HEMPEL, OSCAR W.—Your father is dead and your mother is eager for your return. Please communicate with her at once. Mrs. W. Hempel, 428 West Cedar Street, Cherokee, Iowa.

HAMBRICK, CLAUDE V.—He was in Colebrook, New Hampshire, about a year ago, and was planning to go to Sherbrook, Canada. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will confer a favor by writing to Mrs. R. M. Hambrick, Stone Mountain, Georgia.

BRADY, RONDO.—He was last heard of in Graham, Texas, two years ago. His mother is suffering from a street-car accident, and is in great need of his assistance. Please write to Mrs. Herbert B. Linscott, 504 Abisco Avenue, Alamo Heights, San Antonio, Texas.

EMMONS, JIM.—He is forty-four years of age and had a farm in Oklahoma. His only sister is ill and needs his assistance. Mrs. G. H. Nettleton, 1102 South Maskitor Street, El Dorado, Arkansas.

CLARK, CHARLIE.—He was in Elkhart, Indiana, in January, 1924. He is thirty years of age, five feet ten inches in height, has a dark complexion, dark-brown eyes and hair, and is sometimes called Paul Lewis. Please write to your mother at once, as she is worried. Mrs. Sarah Clark, Kings Valley, Oregon.

STANLEY, BIRDINE.—I have tried to reach you in Chicago, Illinois, but all mail was returned. Please send your address to Mrs. Francis D. Crary, 113 Chestnut Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

LORENCE, S. FRANK.—He is five feet five inches in height, weighs one hundred and sixty pounds, and was in Billings, Montana, and in Dickinson, North Dakota, some time ago. Please send all information to Henry Pavis, 5277 Luna Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

VEAZIE, HAROLD JOSEPH.—He is eighteen years of age, five feet four inches in height, has a light complexion, brown hair, and blue eyes. When he left home on July 30, 1924, he was wearing a gray shirt, a light cap with red stripes, a dark-blue sweater, and dark-brown army shoes. His mother is heartbroken over his departure, and will welcome news concerning him. Mrs. Mary L. Veazie, 18 Polk Street, Charlestown, Massachusetts.

WEIR, MARY BRYAN (nee Logan or Davidson), who formerly came from Scotland. Please write to D. Davidson, 100 Bloor Street, West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

HEILMAN, CHARLIE O.—He was a soldier in China with the Fifteenth Infantry during 1914 to 1916. An old pal is very eager to hear from you. Robert W. Wear, 2314 Sixth Avenue, North, Birmingham, Alabama.

JACKSON, ROY D.—He was living at 860 Biryhoff Street, Akron, Ohio, several years ago. Please notify D. B., care of this magazine.

THOMPSON, ANDREW and **ELIZABETH.**—Please write to me if you wish to find out about your children. James died on March 30, 1893. Antonio is now thirty-six years of age. A. Thompson, 139 Winter Street, New Britain, Connecticut.

NACO, HARRY.—Your wife is worried and wishes you to return home. She and the baby are well, but they ask for you daily. Please write as soon as you see this, as there is important news for you. J. P. P., care of this magazine

KOKER, MAYME.—Will you please send me your address, and I will explain why I did not write? Mac B. Dunlap, Sultan, Washington.

CHURCHIE.—We have sold out in Hawthorne, and are now living between Fifth and Sixth Street in Lawndale, California. Please write at once or return home.

ALLEN, EDWARD.—Everything about the car is O. K. I am ill and need your assistance. Please return home. I love you. Vera, Box 227, Florissant, Colorado.

CADORETTE, ELMER, CORINNE, and **SMITH, EMILY.** Elmer was working in the shipyards in Buffalo, New York, during the war; Corinne and Emily were last heard of in Tacoma, Washington. Any one knowing their present address will kindly write to Norman Como, 547 Fletcher Street, Lowell, Massachusetts.

GANOE, WILLIAM.—Please let me hear from you, as I am worried. Ollie, care of this magazine.

PALM, PAUL.—He disappeared from Youngstown, Ohio, on March 21, 1915, at the time when he was about to undergo a physical examination on entering the employment of the Republic Iron and Steel Company. He formerly came from Pennsylvania, is five feet ten inches in height, has brown eyes, dark-brown hair, and weighs one hundred and sixty pounds. His brother is very eager to find him, and will welcome any helpful information. J. C. Palm, R. F. D. 1, Box 251, Altoona, Pennsylvania.

ROONEY, J.—I have lived in Washington, District of Columbia, for some time, and have been searching for you. I love you and am most eager to hear from you. Helen, care of this magazine.

JIM or **WALTER.**—Marion is dying with heart trouble, and is at present staying with her grandmother. Please write to me before you decide to come home as everything is not O. K. as yet. Mother is not well and would like to see you. Norma, care of this magazine.

KUSH, WILLIAM A.—He disappeared from Heber Springs, Arkansas, on May 25, 1923. His wife and children are ill and are very anxious to find him. Mrs. Etta Kush, St. Louis Provident Association, 1502 St. Louis Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

MORRISON, CHARLES W.—He formerly came from Cromwell, Indiana, but was last heard of in Spokane, Washington, in 1900. Your father and mother are dead and your sister Ida is worried about you. Please write to your niece, Mrs. Etta Whirledge, 519 South Third Street, Goshen, Indiana.

PATTON, WILLIAM.—He left his home in November, 1922. Your mother is ill and wishes you to return home. Mrs. J. G. Leech, 1722 S. Street, Sacramento, California.

MUNKERS, MARSHALL R.—He formerly lived in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, but in 1921, he was seen in Kansas City, Missouri. We are now living in Florida. Please communicate with Eleanor, care of this magazine.

GRIFFIN, JACOB.—He was in Massachusetts about sixteen years ago. Please get in touch with me at once, as I have important news for you. Mrs. E. L. Sterner, Valley View Farm, Route 2, Brandon, Wisconsin.

MAXWELL, JACK.—He worked in a museum in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1917, and later went to Chicago, Illinois. Any information will be gratefully received. B. B. M., care of this magazine.

HENDERSON, THOMAS.—He lived at 166 Eleventh Avenue, New York City, and was expecting to leave for South Africa last January. Please communicate with Eric B. Emmett, Forcett, Tasmania, Australia.

WHITE, WILLIAM EDWARD.—He was last heard of in St. Louis, Missouri. He is fifty-six years of age, five feet six inches in height, has gray hair, blue eyes, a red mustache, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. His daughter is dead, and there is an estate to be settled. S. J. W., care of this magazine.

MORRIS, JOHN A.—He was last seen in Topeka, Kansas, on September 1, 1923. He is eighteen years of age, six feet in height, has red hair, brown eyes, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. His mother is ill, and would appreciate news concerning him. Write to Mrs. Ida Olsen, R. R. 27, Topeka, Kansas.

MAGOON, LEE.—He is five feet six inches in height, twenty-seven years of age, has light-blue eyes, black hair, a birthmark over his right ear, and weighs one hundred and twenty-five pounds. He left Salisbury, North Carolina, two years ago, and has not been heard of since. His present address will be appreciated by Carl A. Miller, New London, North Carolina.

HITSON, FRED or **TEXAS.**—He had taken a homestead near Clearmont, Wyoming, in 1914. His old pal is very anxious to hear from him, and will welcome his present address. A. Herrin, 427 North Third Avenue, Bozeman, Montana.

S. A. W.—The children are well. Please send your address to K., and I will give you the news. J.

DICKENS, ALICE K.—She was born in 1854, and was married to Walter A. Knowlton at Roseville, Illinois, in 1872. It will be of great advantage to her if she communicates with Arthur L. Dickens, Creswell, Oregon.

JOHNSON, HIRAM.—He was seen in Washington, District of Columbia, in 1891. He is five feet nine inches in height, thirty-one years of age, has a dark complexion, black eyes and hair, and a small mole on one side of his nose. He is a painter by trade. Please let me hear from you, as I still love you and want you to return home. H. J. Ella, care of this magazine.

MILLER, FRANK LESTER.—I long for you, and pray for your return. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Ada M. Miller, 80 Cliff Street, Roxbury, Massachusetts.

DOAN, MURDO CLYDE.—He is five feet two inches in height, twenty-four years of age, has dark hair, blue eyes, and was in Florida in September, 1921. His sister and father are very eager to hear from him. Edmund D. Doan, 114 Garden Street, Lansing, Michigan.

DUNLEAVEY, DANIEL J.—He was a soldier at Fort Logan, Colorado, in Company L, Second Infantry, during 1903 to 1904. He has dark hair and eyes, and is small in build. Send all information to G. H. S., care of this magazine.

GORE, BETTY.—She was in Cleveland, Ohio, on December 6, 1922. Do you remember the sailor you met in Erie, Pennsylvania, in December, 1922? I have been back to sea since March, 1923, and will be in New York again in January, 1925. My home address is 71 Loveland Street, Kingston, Pennsylvania, but please write me in care of this magazine. John J. Smith.

GRAHAM, THOMAS and **ALICE J.**—They lived in Canada about twenty years ago. Their son is very anxious to find them, and will welcome their present whereabouts. George Francis Graham, 59 West Sixty-second Street, New York City.

BOYDELL, GLADYS.—She formerly lived in Fairhope, Pennsylvania, but is now supposed to be in New Jersey. Please send all information to William Doherty, General Delivery, Twelfth Street, Wheeling, West Virginia.

ASBURY, CLARE.—Kindly communicate with your sister, Sylvia, at 505 Eighteenth Street, Oakland, California.

BOSHELL, WILLIAM H.—He was born at 9 Westland Row, Dublin, Ireland, on March 22, 1877. He left Ireland, and came to New York City, about twenty-five years ago, where he worked for his uncle, Patrick Duffy. His father is dead and his mother is lonely. Please get in touch with her immediately. Mrs. Boshell, Alphala Cottage, Northcumberland Road, Dublin, Ireland.

CRAWFORD, LEE.—He served in the World War, and after being discharged he went to Moline, Illinois. A dear friend would like to get in touch with him, as he is ill and needs his assistance. M. B., care of this magazine.

YOUNG, THEODORE.—Any one knowing his present whereabouts will kindly communicate with Rymes, care of this magazine.

MURRAY, JOHN.—Please return home, as I cannot stand this separation any longer. I love you. Lillian.

GAYNES, WILLIE.—He is five feet eight inches in height, has dark hair, gray eyes, and one leg missing. He left his home, in Oakville, Texas, about seventeen years ago, but was last heard of in Danville, Ohio. Please write to his niece, Mrs. C. B. F. Jackson, Route D, Box 686, San Antonio, Texas.

BROWN, TEDDIE.—He left his home on December 11, 1923, and went to Fort Scott, Kansas. He is seventeen years of age, five feet seven inches in height, has light hair, and weighs one hundred and forty-five pounds. Please send all information to Mrs. W. W. Brown, West Liberty, Iowa.

MINDRUM, JOHN.—He is of Swedish descent, twenty-five years of age, and was living in Superior, Wisconsin, some time ago. Any one having information will confer a favor by writing to Mrs. E. O. Mindrum, Palisade, Minnesota.

LOVETT, CHARLES.—He was a seaman, and he left his home in Weymouth, Nova Scotia, in 1869, and was seen in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1872. His brother would like to hear from him, and will be grateful for any news. John W. Lovett, 6 Cogswell Avenue, Bradford, Massachusetts.

DUCKWORTH, NINA JUANITA.—She was at one time at Kempton, West Virginia, and Baltimore, Maryland. She has brown hair and eyes, and is sixteen years of age. Please send news to Joseph F. Duckworth, 5225 Center Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

ONGLEY, GEORGE HENRY.—He was at Martin's Ferry, Ohio, about two years ago. His brother, Jack, is worried, and is very anxious to know his present whereabouts. Write to J. Nelson, County Gates Garage, Bournemouth, West, England.

SCREWS, JESSE.—He is five feet in height, has black hair and eyes, a dark complexion, and was last heard of in Stamford, Texas, about three years ago. His mother and brother are very anxious to hear from him, and will be grateful for any helpful news. Lena Lindsay, care of Maud Colson, Route 2, Ringling, Oklahoma.

COURTNEY, JOHN.—He married Ellen Wilson at Quincy, Massachusetts, thirty-five years ago. Any one having his present address will kindly write to George Dunn, 1140 Commonwealth Avenue, Allston, Massachusetts.

PORTER, THOMAS.—He was in Pittsburgh, Kansas, in 1909. An old friend is very eager to find him, and will welcome any news. John F. F., care of this magazine.

BENJAMIN W.—Please return home as soon as you can. Mother will not trouble you, and everything is O. K. Harold.

L. A. A.—I am still with Mr. and Mrs. B. Mr. B. was ill and was unable to work for two months. Teddy and mother went to C., and I expect to leave Chicago, Illinois, very soon. Please write, as I have no hard feelings toward you. Send mail to 4828. Mrs. L. A.

SEARCY C.—Please communicate with me as soon as possible. I wrote you in care of Seamen's Bethel, Galveston, Texas. Address Albert Salinsky, Lake Carriers' Association, South Chicago, Illinois.

STAN.—I have sold the timber on the old place and am now staying at home. We are all so anxious to see you. The baby was born on February 11, 1924. Mrs. W. H. Young.

MICKLER, MARTIN A.—He is thirty-five years of age, five feet six inches in height, and has red hair. Please write to M. C. Maxfield, 114 East Virginia Street, Evansville, Indiana.

MOWERY, CALVIN.—He was in Nevada some time ago, but has not been heard of since. His niece would like to hear from him. Mrs. Addie C. Mowery Newman, Route 5, Parker, South Dakota.

CRAVEN, JAMES WILLIAMS.—He is forty-two years of age, five feet eight inches in height, has blue eyes, and dark-brown hair. His father would like to get in touch with him. Thomas V. Cravens, 2618 Seneca Street, St. Joseph, Missouri.

HOLT, J.—Wire me at the old address at once. I have news for you. Beatrice.

SARGEANT, GEORGE.—He is five feet nine inches in height, thirty-nine years of age, has dark-brown hair, gray eyes, and weighs one hundred and eighty pounds. He was living with his sister, Myrtle, in Vancouver, British Columbia. She is fourteen years of age, five feet six inches in height, has blue eyes, and light-brown hair. Please notify Olive Sargeant, 240 Georgia Street, West, Vancouver, British Columbia.

GOMES, SCEAREL.—He is twenty-three years of age, and has a dark complexion. He left Emptre City, Oklahoma, on August 21, 1921, to seek employment in the oil fields, and was seen two weeks later near Healdton, Oklahoma. Write to Mrs. Gomes, Burkburnett, Texas.

GUINARD, MELVIN.—He is five feet ten inches in height, has dark hair and eyes, the United States flag tattooed on his right arm, and weighs one hundred and fifty-five pounds. He was in Fullerton, Nebraska, on January 26, 1919, and was planning to go to Kansas. His brother is very eager to find him, and will welcome any information. L. F. Guinard, 116 North Main Avenue, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

RAINS, Mrs. MAUD.—I would like to get in touch with my mother, whom I have not seen since 1913. I was placed in a Methodist orphanage, in Waco, Texas, soon after she left me. Any one knowing her present address will kindly communicate with Samuel F. Rains, 1024 Austin Avenue, Waco, Texas.

F. J.—Please come home, as I have forgiven everything. Send me your address. Your youngest brother and I were ill. Mrs. T. Kerscher, 796 North Clinton Avenue, Rochester, New York.

BENNETT, Mrs. L. M.—She and her family were living at 165 Sixteenth Street, Seattle, Washington, and in 1909 they came to New York City, where her husband was working as a bartender. Any one knowing her present whereabouts will notify Mrs. Margaret J. Allen, R. D. 1, Box 118, Rehoboth, Massachusetts.

McCOLLUM, JAMES.—I would like to get in touch with my father's people. He was born in the State of New York, and fought in the Civil War. My mother's maiden name was Catherine Carr. Please send all information to Mrs. Hewitt, 447 Beach Boulevard, Hamilton Beach, Ontario, Canada.

CHEEK, ELMA.—Her maiden name was Elma Dover, and at one time she lived in Zanesville and Columbus, Ohio. Please write to me, as I have important news for you. M. M. Stein, Arlington Hotel, Zanesville, Ohio.

OSTENFELD, HANS CHRISTIAN.—Please communicate with me at once. Eden Haack, care of the Danish Legation, 80 Hymayta, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, South America.

HECKMANN, CONRAD.—He left Berlin, Germany, in 1887, and came to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His brother is very anxious to find him, and will welcome news. Paul Heckmann, 50 South Twentieth Street, East Orange, New Jersey.

SCHOCH, ALBERT, NORMAN, GEORGE, CHARLIE.—Please write to your sister, who is living alone and is in great need of you. Martha J. Schoch, 528 Saint Jose Avenue, Trenton, New Jersey.

BEERS, JACK.—Please send me your address as soon as posible, as I have some news for you. Agnes.

DELL, CHARLOTTE.—Please write to your cousin, Leslie Reed, 2019 Main Street, Lewiston, Idaho.

THOMAS, J.—He is fifty-nine years of age, has gray hair, and was last heard of in Hubbard, Texas. His brother would like to hear from him, and would welcome helpful information. C. J. Thomas, Box 669, Navasota, Texas.

MIDDLESWORTH, ROY A.—He left his home town about eight years ago, and is now thirty-three years of age. Please write to Mrs. L. G. Middlesworth, care of this magazine.

MacK., R. J., of Ohio. If you see this please write to me at the same address, as I have important news for you. We are all working for your good. Grandmother hopes to see you again before she dies. Mother and dad.

O'DONNELL, JOSEPH.—He was a former resident of Latrobe and Jeannette, Pennsylvania, and was later employed as a motorman in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Port Arthur, Ontario, Canada. His sister is very anxious for his present address. Mrs. Susie Burgett, Barnhill, Ohio.

ROBERTS, PEARL.—She came from Illinois, but was last heard of in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Please write to me, as there is important business to settle. W. H. Ragan, Route 2, Flint, Michigan.

PIERCE, Miss S.—Please send your address to James Ribon, 2322 North View Avenue, Rocky River, Ohio.

GERHOLD, HENRY.—He is sixty-five years of age, five feet eight inches in height, has black hair, blue eyes, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. He was in Dixon, Illinois, about eight years ago. Please send all information to Ronald Gerhold, 4637 Sacramento Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

THOMPSON, OTTO.—He is a Twenty-fourth Infantry disabled veteran. In 1923 his wife received a letter from the Urban League, Chicago, Illinois, that they had placed him in a home. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will kindly notify his wife, Mrs. Lula C. Thompson, 4207 Avenue E, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

BEANS, W.—Please let me know where you are living. O. B. La Flair, Box 24, Nantucket, Massachusetts.

RILEY, THOMAS ELLIOTT.—He left Ilkeston, England, in 1886, for America and was supposed to be working in the lumber trade. His nephew would be glad to hear from him. Thomas Riley, 6 Lawn Terrace, Pimlico, Ilkeston, England.

FRANCIS, CURLEY C.—Please get in touch with me, as I have some news for you. Mr. V. Francis, 2722 North Racine Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

HOLMES, GEORGE.—He was born near New Carlisle, Indiana, on January 14, 1903. He was known to be in Sioux City, Iowa, four years ago, and later he was heard of in Durham, North Carolina. Any one knowing his present address will confer a favor by writing to his brother Chester, care of this magazine.

BORDERS, MERRILL A.—I will send the things you asked for as soon as you will let me have your address. Everything will be O. K. if you return home and settle affairs with Dean. I am going to Bozeman, Montana, as soon as I come to an agreement with Dean. The bank is not looking for you nor is any one else. Mrs. M. A. Borders, Baker, Montana.

G. H. C.—Please write to your pal, as he is anxious for you. R. C.

FRANKLIN, WILLIAM.—He left his home on July 10, 1924. He is fourteen years of age, five feet in height, has blue eyes, and dark-brown hair. His mother is heart-broken over his departure, and will welcome helpful information. Mrs. Ivan Franklin, Box 91, Camp Point, Illinois.

RANDOLPH, L. H.—He is tall and slender, with dark complexion, black hair and blue eyes. He is a barber by trade. Any one knowing his address will kindly notify T. B., care of this magazine.

ROBERTS, WILLIAM.—He lived near Gate City, Virginia, several years ago. It was reported that he died somewhere in Oklahoma. His sons were named Rufus, Patton, Bradley, Ballard, Emmett, and Charlie, and they are scattered in the West and Southwest. Any one of them who sees this notice will please write to Rufus M. Fry, Box 629, Middlesboro, Kentucky.

DUNAWAY, DAVID A.—He was living at 1616 Douglas Avenue, Ames, Iowa. Any one knowing his present whereabouts kindly notify M. A. Dunaway, 235 South Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

FRY, JAMES.—He was a Union soldier, who married a Miss Marcum in Virginia, and was last heard of in Illinois. He has six brothers, Calvin, John, Evan, Hillary, Zimery, Joseph, and one sister, named Cynthia. Any information concerning them will be extremely welcome. Rufus M. Fry, Box 629, Middlesboro, Kentucky.

GRAY, WILLIAM E.—He left his home on June 17, 1922, and was seen in Portland, Maine. He is nineteen years of age, has dark hair, and brown eyes. Please write to his grandmother, Mrs. C. E. Chapman, E. F. D. 6, Norwich, Connecticut.

HODGMAN, D. FRANK.—He was a carpenter who left Glens Falls, New York, in 1917, to build a hospital at Kingston, New York, for the government, and from there he went to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His father has died, and he is needed to settle an estate. C. W. Reads, 1454 Lakewood Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

KIRKHAM or RASMUSSEN, JAMES.—I have tried for three years to get in touch with you. Please send your present address to your old pal from Portland and Seattle. John S. Haynes, Box 537, Sioux City, Iowa.

La VERA, JOSE.—Kindly let me know where you are living. John S. Haynes, Box 537, Sioux City, Iowa.

MORRIS, K. T.—He left San Marcos, Texas, for Oklahoma. He is six feet in height, has dark hair, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. Please send all information to Monroe Vooheries, South San Antonio Street, San Marcos, Texas.

HOFFMAN, JOSEPH.—You promised to write to me when you left for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Please communicate with me as soon as possible. M. Wykoff, 8 Roosevelt Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey.

BLACK, JOHN WESLEY.—He is sixty-five years of age, of medium height, and was in North Carolina in 1922. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will kindly write to Mrs. Millie Lundy, 5 Hilton Street, Eureka Springs, Arkansas.

HALE, LENA.—She formerly lived in Roanoke, Virginia. She is five feet three inches in height, has blue eyes, dark hair, and a fair complexion. Please notify B. J. C., care of this magazine.

HENDERSON, OSCAR M.—He is twenty-five years of age, and was living at 1122 West Adams Street, Chicago, Illinois. Please send his present address to his mother, Mrs. L. Henderson, 1056 Macadam Street, Portland, Oregon.

RIDDER, STEPHEN T.—He worked on a ranch for J. E. Bohmont, in Wheatland, Wyoming, and was planning to go to Montana. He is six feet in height, has dark hair, and brown eyes. Any information will be appreciated by his sister, R. L. Ridder, Alexander, Illinois.

BOBENHONSEN, CLARENCE.—Your brother is very anxious to hear from you. Henry Bobenhonsen, 1014 Bryant Street, San Francisco, California.

ELFELT, CHARLES A.—I have been ill, but am now working. Charles is well, and we are all anxious to hear from you, as we have many things to tell you. If you see this please write. Pearl Elfelt, 9221 St. Clair Avenue, care of Doctor Lazerick, Cleveland, Ohio.

LESTER or JACK.—Please get in touch with me at once. I am heartbroken and want you to return home. Send mail to the same address. Your wife, Rena.

NOLAN, WILLIAM JAMES.—He formerly came from Bolton, England. Kindly communicate with your old chum, James Gaitley, Bridge House, Scar Village, Harrogate, England.

DEL.—Please let me hear from you. I have written you several letters, but they were returned. Victor B, 1295 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California.

LINDER, PAUL R.—He was in Montreal, Canada, in 1915. Any one knowing his present address will kindly notify F. W. Linder, 225 Cleveland Street, Bristol, Pennsylvania.

HARTWIG, HOWARD.—He was in Mansfield, Ohio, in March, 1919. He is six feet in height, has black hair and blue eyes. His brother is very anxious to find him and will welcome any helpful news. Russell Hartwig, Marine Barracks, Sumay, Guam.

MURPHY, EDWARD and LARRY.—Your brothers would like to hear from you. J. L. Murphy, 1631 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, California.

ODEN, W. A.—He was living in Corsicana, Texas, on November 27, 1923. He is five feet eight inches in height, has light-brown hair, blue eyes, and is forty-seven years of age. His daughter is lonesome and wants him to return home. Bonnie Violet Oden, 316 West Delaware Street, Nowata, Oklahoma.

SCOTT, HELEN G., or TORRANCE, FLO J.—An old friend would like to hear from him. Mrs. Lou Jean Harthaway, 3000 North Twenty-first, Waco, Texas.

CLYDE, C. E.—It is two years since we have parted, and I have not been able to forget. Please let me hear from you, as I know you still love me and the baby. Betty, Box 1334, Paterson, New Jersey.

BUCK, JOHN and HARRY.—They left England to go to Canada several years ago. Please communicate with R. Park, Billinudgel, New South Wales, Australia.

THOMAS, H. H.—Please get in touch with me. I want you, and nothing can change my love. We have moved from 1800 Summitt to 408 Rose Street. Ollie.

MANDT, THEODORE A.—Please write to me as soon as possible. A. W. G., 2947 Blue Bird Street, Butte, Montana.

CORSEY, BOB.—He played the trombone with the Ed. C. Mutt Show at Pensacola, Florida, in 1920, and when last heard of he was with the Johnny Jones Show in southern Florida. Please send all information to T. K., care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—I would be glad to hear from any of the old boys whom I knew in Golden, New Mexico, in 1880. S. W. Paxson, Willamina, Oregon.

SINERIN, JOE.—Any one knowing his whereabouts will confer a favor by writing to G. H. Scribner, Hardy, Iowa.

NORTON, GEORGE.—He was last seen in Minnesota. Please notify G. H. Scribner, Hardy, Iowa.

UREAD, WILLIAM ERVIN.—He was born in Lakeland, Florida, in 1882; moved to Keysville, Florida, in 1900, and married in Spokane, Washington, in 1908. In 1915 he returned to Florida, but soon left for Seattle, Washington, and was later heard from in Atlanta, Georgia. He has hazel eyes, brown hair, and walks with a slight limp. Please send news to Mrs. John, Box 953, Cocoa, Florida.

PETEE, MELVIN T.—He was living in Oroville, California, in 1922. He is five feet six inches in height, has blue eyes, black hair, weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds, and is of French descent. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will kindly write to Ruth Wickens, 320 East Eighth Street, Port Angeles, Washington.

HERRICK, JACK.—Why don't you return home? If you stay away too long it may be too late. M. M. W., 120 West Second Street, North Platte, Nebraska.

HARTWIG, JAMES A.—He left Carbondale, Pennsylvania, about two years ago, with another young man by the name of James Clarke. They are probably following up their occupations in another town. Mr. Hartwig is a linesman and Mr. Clarke is a gas fitter. Any helpful information will be greatly received by a former friend. Frank J. Finnegan, care of the Carbondale Gas Company, Carbondale, Pennsylvania.

HENRY B.—He was last heard of in Brooklyn, New York. Please write or wire immediately, as everything is forgiven. I am worried and ill and long for your return. Pauline D.